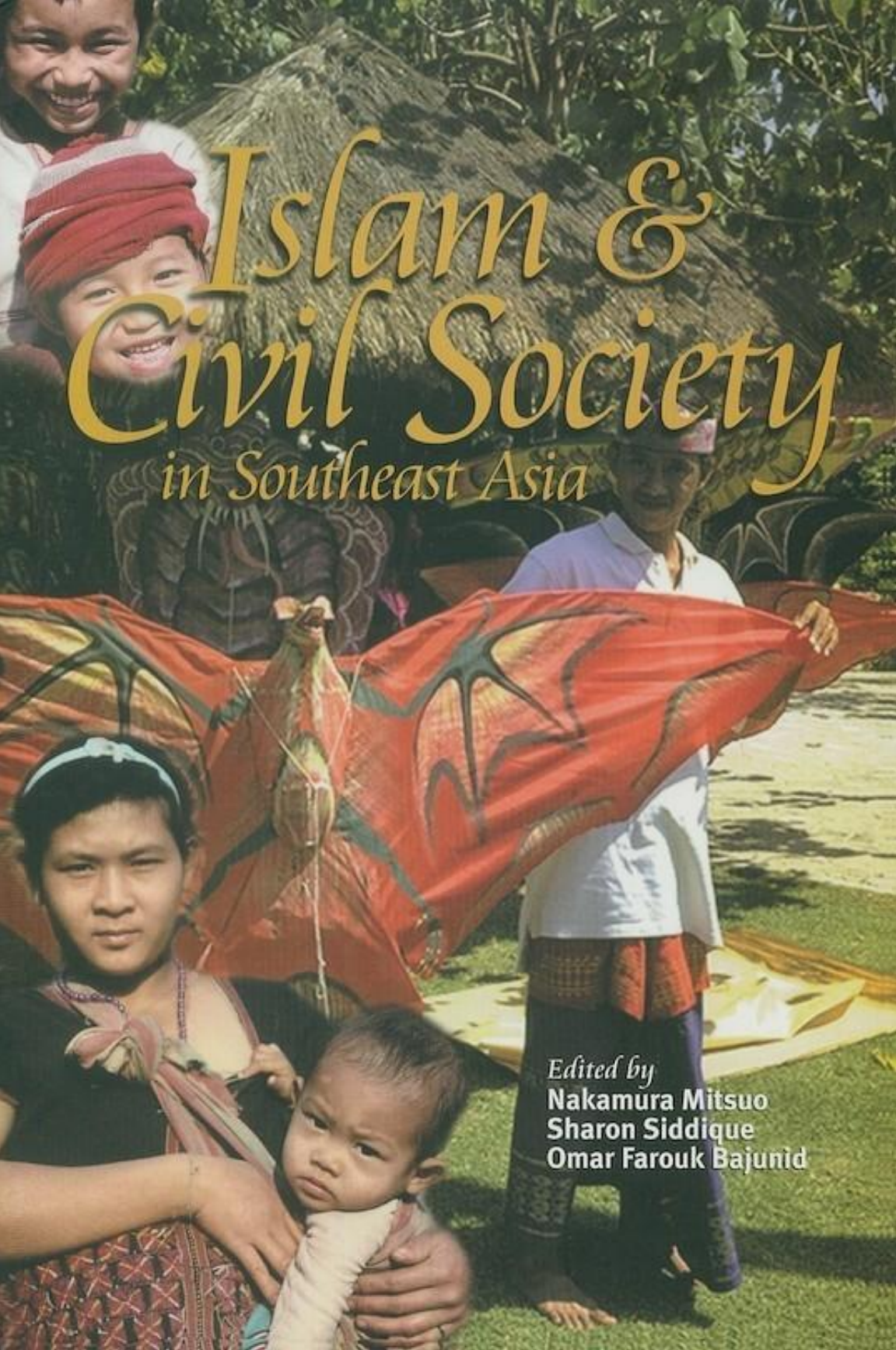
Islam &
Civil Society
in Southeast Asia
Edited by
Nakamura Mitsuo
Sharon Siddique
Omar Farouk Bajunid

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Islam & Civil Society
in Southeast Asia

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Islam & Civil Society
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INSTITUTE OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN STUDIES
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Preface

This volume is the result of a two-day closed intensive seminar and a half-day open symposium entitled "Islam and Civil Society: Messages from Southeast Asia", held on 5–7 November 1999 in Japan, sponsored by the Sasakawa Peace Foundation. Ten paper-presenters from five countries of Southeast Asia participated in the seminar, joined by ten commentators from Japan. In the open symposium, more than one hundred individuals — scholars, graduate students, activists from non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and staff of non-political organizations (NPOs), business and media people, and government officials – were present.

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation planned the conference and commissioned the project to me as general co-ordinator. The Foundation also sought the co-operation of Professor Nurcholish Madjid, Rector of Paramadina Mulya University, Indonesia, as another general co-ordinator. In preparation for the conference, I visited all ten countries in Southeast Asia for a preliminary survey and consultation.

In July 1999, I set out for the first half of my journey and made contact with the following people: Dato Michael Mastura in the Philippines; Dr Iik Arifin Mansurnoor of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) and a number of his colleagues at UBD in Brunei; in Singapore, Mr Zainal Abidin Rasheed (Ministry of Foreign Affairs/MENDAKI), Dr Sharon Siddique, and Dr Syed Farid Alatas and his colleagues at the National University of Singapore; and in Malaysia, Prof. Mohd. Kamal Hassan, Rector of the International Islamic University of Malaysia, Prof. Dato' Osman Bakar, Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University of Malaya, Dr Dato' Ismail bin Ibrahim, Director of the Institute of Islamic Understanding of Malaysia (IKIM) and his colleagues, amongst others.

On my return, I stopped over in Jakarta and consulted with K. H. Abdurrahman Wahid (then General Chairman of the Nahdlatul Ulama and now fourth President of the Republic of Indonesia), Prof. Syafi'i Ma'arif (then Acting General Chairman of the Muhammadiyah), Prof. Malik Fadjar (then Minister for Religious Affairs), and some others concerning Indonesian representation to the conference. I also had a discussion with Nurcholish Madjid to finalize the list of delegates from island Southeast Asia.

In August 1999, I left Japan again for five countries in mainland Southeast Asia. In Thailand, I talked to Dr Chaiwat Satha-Anand of

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Thammasat University and some others, and then visited Myanmar. In Myanmar, I met, among other people, Mr U Thein, President of the Islamic Religious Affairs Council of Myanmar, with whom I was already acquainted, and obtained follow-up information on the position of Muslim communities in the country. I then proceeded to Vietnam, where I was assisted by Mr Phu Van Han, a researcher on the Champa-Melayu culture at the Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Institute of Social Sciences, Ho Chi Minh City. I travelled next to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, where the Foreign Ministry welcomed me (the Ambassador of Cambodia in Tokyo, His Excellency Mr Ing Kieth, had kindly notified the Ministry of my visit). Accordingly, I was able to see a number of Muslim leaders including Mr Tol Lah, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Youth and Culture, and several MPs including Mr Math Ly, President of the Cambodian Islamic Association. Through the Cambodian contact, I was able to meet Mr Keu Seu and Mr Yahya Ishak, President and Vice-President respectively, of the Lao Muslim Association in Vientiane, Laos, where I made the last stop of my journey.

On the basis of my report on the field trips, the Foundation decided to invite ten individuals from five countries as overseas participants for the conference in Japan. Although I was involved in the decision-making, I do not dare claim to be comprehensive or balanced in my choice of participants since there are many obvious gaps. It is regrettable indeed that delegations from Brunei, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam were left out this time primarily because of budgetary limitations. At the same time, I expect that readers who are familiar with Muslim Southeast Asia will agree with us that the line-up of the overseas participants for the purpose of listening to the representative voices of Muslim intellectuals from contemporary Southeast Asia was in itself no small achievement.

Ten Japanese participants were invited to respond as commentators. Some of them already had firsthand knowledge of Islam in Southeast Asia through their respective fieldwork, like Tokoro Ikuya (Tokyo University of Foreign Studies) who had worked on the Philippines, Kaneko Yoshiki (Matsuzaka University) on Brunei, Singapore, and Malaysia, and Nakamura Hisako (Bunkyo University) as well as Miichi Ken (Kobe University) on Indonesia. Some were already familiar with Islam in other parts of the Islamic world, like Nakanishi Hisae (Nagoya University) on Iran and Nejima Susumu (National Museum of Ethnology) on Pakistan. The remaining two, Shuto Motoko (Komazawa University) and Takeda Isami (Dokkyo University), however, had no intimate knowledge of Islam but had a strong regional studies background and knowledge of Southeast

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Asia. Among the participants from Japan's side, Omar Farouk Bajunid (Hiroshima City University) was in the unique position of representing both Southeast Asian Muslim intellectuals and Japanese academia.

I believe that the occasion was a significant one of fresh intellectual learning for most of the Japanese scholars and members of the audience. Many of them heard for the first time directly from responsible Islamic intellectuals that "Islam and democracy can be compatible and complementary, and Muslim civil society is enhancing the relationship". In addition, the occasion facilitated actual contact of civil society activists for future co-operation between Japan and Southeast Asia. It was also an opportunity for reciprocal learning among Muslim participants.

Nakamura Mitsuo
Professor Emeritus
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July 2000

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1

Introduction

Nakamura Mitsuo

BACKGROUND

It seems appropriate here to state what is meant by "civil society" in this volume. Although the various chapter writers have not jointly attempted to define the term explicitly, they seem to be more or less in agreement in using the term to refer to the public sphere between the state and the individual, which is really the widest common understanding of civil society in recent literature. Likewise, the writers are also concerned with either or both of the two aspects implied by the term, namely: (a) voluntary associational life on the one hand, and (b) civility, or civic virtues on the other. In the former usage, the term is used as a comprehensive category to refer to a wide range of voluntary organizations, including traditional volitional institutions as well as contemporary civic institutions and associations including NGOs (non-government organizations), POs (people's organizations), NPOs (non-profit organizations), and philanthropic organizations. In the latter case, values or normative principles constituting the foundation of society and regulating social relationships — most importantly state–society relationship — become the focus of concern.

The pairing of "Islam" and "civil society" in this book underlines an awareness that the relevance of Islam for civic values as well as the significance of associational life among Muslims for the civility of the entire society should become the subject of serious intellectual inquiry. More urgently, it is assumed that these two aspects of Islamic civil society should be approached from the viewpoint of exploring their roles in the dynamic processes of democratization and the empowerment of people in contemporary Southeast Asia. This volume presents the results of this exploration based upon recent Muslim experiences.

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More broadly viewed, there was a convergence of several developments behind this project on Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia. Among these, the following seem to have been significant for the crystallization of the project:

- Rising concern for civil society in Europe and the United States since the late 1980s;
- Growing awareness in Japan of the importance of NGOs, NPOs, and philanthropy in public life;
- Rapid emergence of civil society in the Asia-Pacific region;
- "Discovery" of Islamic civil society in the Middle East and North Africa; and
- Increasing assertiveness of Islamic civil society as an important actor in the recent trends of democratization in Southeast Asia.

The relevance of these developments for the formulation of this particular project are discussed below.

Rising Concern for Civil Society in Europe and the United States

As is well recognized, the recent revival of the idea of "civil society" started in Europe and the United States in the late 1980s with the end of Cold War. The fall of socialist authoritarian regimes in the former Soviet bloc, especially those in Central and Eastern Europe, and also the demise of developmental dictatorships in Latin America went hand in hand with the process of democratization and the empowerment of civil society. Practical as well as theoretical concerns relating to civil society were first directed to the transformation of those authoritarian regimes, but subsequently were re-directed towards the examination of organizational and philosophical foundations of Western democracies. Cohen and Arato comprehensively follow and discuss this process of intellectual development in their monumental works.[1] Yet, as Chaiwat Satha-Anand has observed in this volume (Chapter 6), they did not cover civil society in the Islamic world. Muslim civil society has remained as a lacuna.

Growing Awareness in Japan of the Significance of NGOs and NPOs in Public Life

The Japanese economy that had experienced unprecedented growth for three decades since the 1960s crashed in the early 1990s. Its aftermath was political uncertainty, social stagnation, and moral decay. In a reverse

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relationship to this economic downturn, however, Japan witnessed a phenomenal growth of NGOs, NPOs and philanthropy during the same period. The emergence of voluntarism accelerated with the relief activities for the victims of the Hanshin Earthquake in 1995. Weakening influence of political parties gave impetus to non-ideological participatory politics nationally as well as locally. The enactment of the NPO law in 1998 placed a milestone in the development of philanthropy and voluntarism in Japan.

Internationally, in addition to its already huge amount of official development assistance (ODA) in the field of economic development, Japan's more positive contribution in such non-economic fields as security and peacekeeping activities, and social welfare and human resources development was called for. The Japanese Government responded to this call with much closer co-operation with NGOs, domestic as well as overseas, than before.[2]

The Japanese Government had hesitated, however, to approach Islamic civil society in its overseas aid activities for a long time. This was partly because of the fact that the Constitution of Japan required the strict separation of government from religion in order to prevent the revival of pre-war militarism inspired by the state religion, Shinto. Japan's ODA, therefore carefully avoided any involvement with things religious. A parallel situation existed with Japanese civil society. Until the late 1990s, Japanese NGOs and philanthropic organizations paid little attention to their counterparts in the Islamic world. Perhaps, this was partly because of the necessity to separate religion from public life in general as required by the Japanese Constitution and partly because of the fear of things Islamic in particular in view of the negative media coverage often given to it, or simply because of sheer unfamiliarity with the social significance of Islamic civil society on the Japanese side.

Emergence of Civil Society in the Asia-Pacific Region

Meanwhile, a series of drastic developments changed the public scene in the Asia-Pacific region. A remarkable political transformation occurred in the Philippines with the downfall of the Marcos regime as a consequence of "People Power" in 1986. Subsequent governments in the Philippines have been characterized by synergies of the state and NGOs and POs (people's organizations).[3] Significant progress towards democratization was also achieved in South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand accompanying the enhancement of the role of civil society. Meanwhile, the end of the

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Cold War opened up the opportunity for Southeast Asian governments to strive for the goal of comprehensive regional co-operation in the form of ASEAN-10 regardless of the differences in their respective political systems. The co-operation among governments as well as civil societies in the Asia-Pacific region has been greatly accelerated in this changing scenario.

Economic growth and political democratization seemed to be advancing hand in hand, albeit in a zigzag manner, through the upsurge of the "East Asian Miracle" which also included the major countries in Southeast Asia until the latter half of the 1990s. A new middle class, which had emerged as a by-product of this process, started to assume the role of the locomotive for democratic transformation in the region. Even in Indonesia and Malaysia where developmental authoritarianism had tight control over social life, the enlargement of the middle class entailed the steady development of NGOs in quantity as well as in quality throughout the 1980s and 1990s. [4] Networking of civil society across the Asia-Pacific region also developed significantly during the same period.

All these trends were well documented in a useful resource book compiled by Yamamoto and his staff at the JCIE (Japan Center for International Co-operation).[5] In fact, the publication of the book itself was a reflection of the fact that Japan's NGOs, NPOs and philanthropic organizations were developing closer co-operation with their counterparts in the Asia-Pacific region and coming to play a pivotal role in the region. The paucity of information on Islamic civil society in the region is nevertheless evident.

Following the lead of Yamamoto and the JCIE, the Institute of Developing Economies began to organize research projects on civil society in Asia, resulting in a number of publications. [6] In these publications, however, Islamic civil society of Southeast Asia has been underrepresented and has not been given the due attention it deserves in spite of its resilience, continuity and pervasiveness at the grassroots level.

"Discovery" of Islamic Civil Society in the Middle East and North Africa

Most contemporary Western social science literature deriving either from Karl Marx or Max Weber considers bourgeois citizenry (that became the nucleus of modern civil society) to have been born only through Western capitalism. In contrast, the ethos of the Islamic world in the Middle East and North Africa is generally depicted as something of an anathema to modern civil society. The Islamic polity which does not allow the separation

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of state from church has been regarded as typical "oriental despotism", with no room for autonomy of citizenry. Samuel Huntington has recently presented an epitome of this view[7] and has reinforced the image that Islam is anti-democratic by nature. He has even warned of inevitable clashes between the Western and Islamic civilizations because of these fundamental differences. Even Ernst Gellner, a respected social anthropologist of Muslim societies, was inclined to support this pessimistic scenario[8] "bordering on Orientalists' prejudice".[9]

Yet a number of Western scholars have observed that vigorous efforts have been going on from within the Islamic world to reinterpret traditional religious resources in pursuit of democracy, civility and civil society. They have argued that Islam should not and cannot be represented by extremist minorities and have drawn attention to ongoing contests among those Muslims who promote democratization in Islamic perspectives and those who oppose or remain indifferent to it.[10] In historical retrospect, they have pointed out that for centuries Islamic civilizations have developed their own versions of civility and civil society which are different from the West. These have included the independence of Muslim communities (*ummah*) from the state under the spiritual leadership of the *ulama* (Islamic scholars), rule of law to protect personal life and property, religious and ethnic pluralism, consultative and consensus methods of decision-making. In short, there has been civility and public sphere in the Islamic world in its own ways including mechanisms to control the arbitrariness of state power and to guarantee the autonomy of diversified associational life.

In fact, a group of Japanese scholars on Islam and the Middle Eastern studies have already argued for the remarkable modernity of Islamic civilization as a highly developed urbanism, in which associational life of the citizens, independent from the state, has fully blossomed.[11] In addition, a strong argument has been presented to regard the recent resurgence of Islam as an alternative way to modernity. From this perspective, the rebirth of Islamic civil society is viewed as a result of a simultaneous process of Islamization and democratization. The growth of Muslim voluntary organizations independent from or even in contrast to the state, the voluntary re-introduction of Islamic law as an ethical guideline for Muslim conduct, and the strengthening of Muslim solidarity through concrete activities for mutual help — those should be regarded, the argument goes, as efforts for the revitalization of Islam through institutional modernization towards participatory politics.[12]

Recently, the significance of Islamic civil society has begun to attract not only academic but also practical concerns of the Western world.

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Interestingly, for example, it was a U.S.-AID field worker who noted that quite a large number of private voluntary organizations (PVOs) were operating in the fields of education, medical care and social welfare at the grassroots level of contemporary Egyptian society. [13] He called for the rectification of the conventional Western approach to the Muslim world based upon the assumption of the absence of civil society in it. Furthermore, he urged that outside observers should look at "a continuing Islam, a deeply rooted, tradition-bound Islam", from which numerous voluntary organizations have sprung up today, instead of "radical Islam". [14]

More recently, a compendium of survey results on civil society in the Middle East and North Africa has effectively refuted the view that negates its presence in the Islamic world.[15] These survey results seem to have been a reflection of the growing discourse among Muslim intellectuals themselves on the subject in close dialogue with non-Muslim scholars from the West.[16] In a similar vein, a Swedish symposium held in Turkey in 1996 explored the complexity of Muslim civil society and its relationship with democracy.[17] Some of the participants even warned of the futility of setting up a dichotomy between the state and civil society. [18]

Assertiveness of Islamic Civil Society for Democratization in Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia, the focus of this volume, is a geographical area in which the world's largest number of Muslims is concentrated. Approximately two hundred million Muslims living in the region, mostly Malay variants in language and culture, represent about one-sixth of the world's total Muslim population — much larger than the total number of Arab Muslims. (See Table 1.1.)

Significant social processes have occurred in the Muslim communities of the region in recent decades with profound bearings on the increasing assertiveness of Islamic civil society. They are (1) rapid economic growth, (2) emergence of the middle class, (3) resurgence of Islam, and (4) increasing popular demands for democratization. These processes have also developed in the context of the increasing globalization of the world economy and the use of information technology.

One of the occasions in which those developments were discussed was an international conference on Islamic studies in Southeast Asia held in Pattani, Thailand, in June 1998 under the sponsorship of the Toyota Foundation.[19] Prof. M. Kamal Hassan of the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) emphasized the urgent need for learning lessons from

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TABLE 1.1
Muslims in Southeast Asia

Country	Total Population	Muslims (n)	Muslims (%)
Indonesia	204,420,000	179,889,600	88.0
Malaysia	22,710,000	12,036,300	53.0
Philippines	75,200,000	3,459,200	4.6
Thailand	61,200,000	3,060,000	5.0
Myanmar	47,260,000	1,701,360	3.6
Singapore	3,870,000	708,210	18.3
Cambodia	11,430,000	491,490	4.3
Brunei	310,000	213,900	69.0
Vietnam	78,060,000	52,000	0.1
Laos	4,967,000	9,934	0.2
Total	509,427,000	201,621,994	39.58

Sources: Total population is taken from the Institute of Developing Economies, *Ajia Doko Nempo 2000* [*Annual Report on Trends in Asia 2000*] (in Japanese). Data on Muslim population follow official statistics of the respective countries.
Official figures for Muslim population in these countries are contested by Muslims. The figures on this table represent the government statistics, which are to be taken as the lowest estimates.

the recent downfall of Soeharto in Indonesia. He made a plea that a critical reappraisal of Islamic heritage is called for in order to keep Islam relevant to the ongoing process of democratization and the empowerment of the people. He proposed to develop anew the Islamic science of governance (*fiqh al-siyasah*) in response to the post-modern situations of pluralism and globalization instead of clinging to the classical description of the world into "abode of peace, war and covenant" (*dar al-Islam, dar al-harb* and *dar al-'ahad*).[20]

Islamic Civil Society in Southeast Asia

Against the background described above, the attention of the Sasakawa Peace Foundation (SPF) was directed to Islamic civil society in Southeast Asia. Iriyama Akira, President of the SPF, took note of the report from the Pattani conference and Professor Kamal's plea mentioned above.[21] The promotion of international networking of civil society has been one of the Foundation's main concerns. The Foundation's new interest in Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia is thus a significant step forward in its effort to widen the coverage on civil society into a truly global perspective

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without neglecting the Islamic sector. It is hoped that this book, the result of an SPF project, will help to fill the lack of information on the part of the outside world about Islamic civil society of Southeast Asia. More generally, the project aimed to contribute to the recognition of the importance of Islam in Southeast Asia and the significance of Southeast Asia in the Islamic world.

At the turn of the century as well as that of the millennium, the Islamic and non-Islamic worlds, or at least the global community of academics and activists concerned with civil society, are beginning to be able to talk to each other in a common language about civility, civil society and democracy, albeit with different genealogies of meaning still attached to these terms.

ISLAM AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

Most of the Muslim populations in the ten contemporary nation-states share a common heritage deriving from Malay Islamic civilization. The civilization was commercial in character, influenced by a number of ethnic groups with a sea-faring way of life, and framed in the polities of maritime states which flourished between the 15th and 17th centuries prior to Western dominance. The Malay language was used as the *lingua franca* of the region, and *Jawi* — Malay written in Arabic script — became the medium of developing intellectual creativity in religion, history, and literature and carrying out diplomacy and trade. Islamic education was developed through *pondok pesantren* (boarding schools). Pilgrimage to Mecca, studies in traditional Islamic scholarship (predominantly of the Shafi'i school of Islamic law) through the *guru-murid* (teacher-disciple) relationship, spiritual genealogy and brotherhood in Sufism — all these contributed to develop extensive networks in the region, reinforced by ongoing kinship and marriage ties among the royal families, *ulama* and traders.[22]

Beyond the common heritage mentioned above, Muslim communities in the region differ greatly from each other in many aspects, some indigenous or pre-Islamic, but most profoundly influenced by the differences in the experiences of colonization and de-colonization.[23] The most conspicuous contrast is found between Malaysian and Indonesian Islam in spite of their obvious common Malay civilizational heritage mentioned above. Dutch colonialism destroyed scores of Muslim sultanates and principalities or reduced them to mere historical relics over centuries in the territories that

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became Indonesia today. The Japanese Occupation forces, having defeated the Dutch, favoured Islamic nationalists and religious leaders over Western-educated aristocrats and bureaucrats in mobilizing the masses for anti-Allied campaigns and thus exacerbated popular antagonism against those indigenous ruling élite incorporated into Dutch colonialism. The birth of Indonesia was eventually won by militant egalitarian nationalism. Attacks by local revolutionaries and militia upon those indigenous rulers, who mostly sided with the Dutch during the war of independence, left only one monarchy, the Sultanate of Yogyakarta, which survives till today. Indonesia became a truncated society prior to its birth as an independent nation-state. This situation produced great latitude for a variety of voluntary associations — many of them Islamic.

In Malaya, in contrast, the British colonial power retained the authority of the sultans in religious and customary matters and gave them financial rewards. Sultans also received large amounts of royalties for concessions in the extraction of natural resources, which was largely manned by migrant labour from China and India. There were little internal animosities developed between the sultans and the subjects in Malay Muslim communities. During World War II, the immediate threat to the Japanese Occupation forces came from the Chinese resistance. In order to counter the Chinese hostilities, the Japanese military authorities tried to mobilize the Malay population under the sultans as a whole. The authority of the Malay traditional rulers was still kept intact to a great degree when Malaya became an independent Federation. Malay society remained "feudal" well after independence and traditional rulers kept Muslim volitional activities under their control.

The historical significance of these variations and their implications for contemporary Islamic civil society are addressed in this volume. However, the development of pro-democracy movements that have recently culminated in Indonesia and Malaysia in a dramatic manner deserves special mention here. In the former, President Soeharto was forced to step down in the face of nation-wide demonstrations of students and urban riots from March to May 1998. Vice-President Habibie, then head of the Indonesian Association of Muslim Intellectuals (ICMI), assumed the Presidency, promising *reformasi*, i.e. democratic reformation in pursuit of civil society (*masyarakat madani*). The notion of civil society quickly became a part of public political discourse.[24] After relatively free and fair general elections were held in June 1999, Abdurrahman Wahid, chairperson of Nahdlatul Ulama — the largest Muslim voluntary organization in Indonesia established in 1926 and a consistent advocator of democratic

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pluralism — was elected to be the fourth President of the Republic by the People's Consultative Assembly in October 1999. This development represented a dramatic turn-about in which a civil society leader was made the head of state. The newly reborn democracy in Indonesia is faced with the challenge of whether a civil society leader in power is capable of overcoming the resistance and sabotage of conservative elements at large in implementing the agenda of *reformasi*.

In Malaysia, Anwar Ibrahim, the former leader of ABIM (Malaysia Islamic Youth Movement), who was designated by Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad as his heir apparent, was gathering his own political momentum by introducing the idea of civil society (*masyarakat madani*) into the political arena. In the mid-1990s, civil society was quickly made a new catchword representing trans-ethnic aspirations for a democratic, transparent and accountable government, challenging implicitly the established alliance of oligarchs among the three major ethnic groups, i.e. Malays, Chinese and Indians.[25] With the downfall of Anwar following his arrest in September 1998, and subsequent conviction and imprisonment, "civil society" has become a forbidden term in public, only to be used continuously by the opposition parties including the new one, Parti Keadilan (Justice Party). The new party, headed by the wife of Anwar, Dr Wan Azizah, made significant inroads into the Malay Muslim communities in the general elections held in November 1999 in alliance with the Chinese and Indian opposition forces. Civil society in Malaysia is fighting an up-hill battle today.

In other parts of Southeast Asia, Islamic civil society has also asserted its presence in a variety of ways.[26] In Thailand, democratization has provided for Muslim participation in government. At present, Muslims in Thailand are represented by the Foreign Minister, the President of the National Assembly, and a number of MPs from various political parties. The education of Muslim children as Thai citizens is well accepted and traditional Muslim education at *ponoh* (=*pondok* or boarding schools) continues to grow in a modern manner, supported both by the central government and local Muslim communities. In the Philippines, the armed struggle for Muslim separatism continues but Muslim civic organizations have also grown, joining forces with POs of other faiths, in providing such basic social services as education, medical care, credits, and job opportunities. In Singapore, in addition to the well-established Muslim organizations under the umbrella of the MUIS (Majlis Ugama Islam Singapore, or Islamic Religious Council of Singapore), the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) was recently organized reflecting the

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emergence of a well-educated middle class from Muslim communities. The AMP has brought in professional skills and organizational sophistication to Muslim civil society as part of the government supported self-help schemes for all ethnic groups. In Cambodia, where a sizeable Muslim population is found, Muslim organizations once persecuted under the Pol Pot regime have been revived and are actively participating in the government and public life. In Vietnam, the liberalization policy of the Communist government has brought back religious freedom and Muslims are now free to organize themselves. Although numerically small, the social visibility of the Vietnamese Muslim minorities has been heightened by the intensified ethnic identity and increasingly frequent contact with the Muslim societies in the region and beyond. Even in Laos, where the Muslim population is almost negligible in number, their presence is quite visible in the capital, assisted by outside Arab-Indian and Malaysian agencies in education and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In Brunei and Myanmar, Islamic civil society is experiencing difficulties in different ways. In Brunei, everything Islamic is a state affair. This small but oil-rich kingdom operates on the foundation of " *Islam beraja*", i.e. Islam with a king, where religious life is inseparable from hereditary political power. There is still little sign of the assertion of the autonomy of the religious community *vis-à-vis* the monarchy. For the time being there will be no room for independent civil society in Brunei. In Myanmar, every sign of independence from, not to speak of disobedience to, the military authorities is monitored and nipped in the bud. Moreover, conflicts between the Muslims, a sizeable minority, and the majority Buddhists seem to have been politically engineered and played up from time to time. There has been a systematic downplaying of the social significance of Myanmar Muslims by the authorities. However, despite the political constraints there seems to be an amazing degree of resilience of Muslim voluntary associations organized for mutual help in the form of endowed trust funds, *waqf* in Myanmar.

RELIGIOUS RESOURCES FOR MUSLIM VOLUNTARISM

Muslim Voluntarism

Muslim voluntarism has firm roots in the religious resources of Islam, i.e. the Qur'an and Hadith, throughout the Islamic world. Help for the poor and needy out of compassion is obligatory and its fulfilment is to be rewarded in the after-life. A series of individual as well as collective duties

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for the common good of the Muslim community, *ummah*, are explicitly stated in those texts. Textually, the following are included as individual Muslim duties (*fard 'ain*): the payments of *zakat maal* (annual wealth tax), *zakat fitrah* (annual poll tax), *sadaqah* (*ad hoc* contribution in cash or service), and *waqf* (or *wakaf*, permanent endowment of property). Muslim duties also include help and care for the family, the poor and needy, orphans and the old-aged, neighbours, strangers, soldiers, students, and converts. The fulfilment of these duties constitutes not only the discharge of religious obligations but also the economic redistribution of wealth and income between the haves and the have-nots, constituting the "flow" in the Muslim moral economy.[27]

In actual social contexts, however, actions to fulfil those duties are carried out or institutionalized in different ways. The diversity seems to derive from a number of circumstantial factors including social, economic, political, cultural, and historical ones with corresponding variations in the interpretation of Islamic law. A survey of the Islamic voluntary sector in Southeast Asia organized by Mohammed Ariff has yielded a good overview of this diversity and made a number of instructive findings that are useful to understand Islamic voluntarism in the region.[28] Ariff's survey allows us to state safely that the constant flow of money, goods and services through the various schemes of volitional acts mentioned above help to integrate local Muslim communities on which the wider Muslim solidarity is firmly based. Contemporary Muslim civil society is part and parcel of this volitional tradition and its modern adaptation and extension.

Among these individual volitional actions, *waqf*, i.e. "permanent provisions for supporting welfare activities", is a significant social contribution.[29] Under *waqf* arrangements, "property is dedicated to a cause so that only the income flowing from it is available for current expenditure in that cause".[30] Thus, *waqf* seems to constitute the "stock" in Muslim moral economy. Typically, a mosque and surrounding shops or a near-by market are constructed on a property donated as *waqf*, the rents from which support the perpetual maintenance of the mosque and educational facilities attached to it. The most conspicuous example of this is the world famous al Azhar Mosque and the al Azhar University in Cairo, Egypt. Income from *waqf* properties of the Azhar Market cover the entire expenditures of both the Mosque and the University, including the salaries of teachers and personnel. Students accepted into the University are not charged tuition or fees at all and some receive scholarships — one of the reasons why it attracts a large number of young people from relatively low-income Muslim families all over the world. Funds of the University are also sufficient to

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send a number of teachers of Arabic and Islamic studies to every corner of the world.

Furthermore, there are numerous collective or socially obligatory duties (*fard qifayah*) carried out on behalf of the entire society. "No closed list of socially obligatory duties is handed down by Sharia."[31] Individuals and groups are free to take initiatives by themselves. The *dakwah* activities, i.e. propagation for enjoining right conduct and forbidding wrong (*al amr bi'l ma'ruf wa'l nahi 'an al munkar)* are based upon this injunction. [32] In recognition of these duties, permanent multi-purpose voluntary organizations in pursuit of the common good have been established in modern times. The Muhammadiyah (established in 1912) and the NU (established in 1926) in Indonesia are typical cases of this generalized voluntarism. In addition to engaging in a number of areas including education, health care and social welfare for the promotion of Muslim well-being, such multi-purpose voluntary organizations also behave as a watchdog over and a flag-waver for the moral conduct of Muslims including that of government — hence, the political implications of those voluntary organizations.

Islam, Civil Society and Civility

The resilience and vitality of Islamic civil society in traditional as well as modern forms is clear. However, there remains the serious question regarding the relevance of Islamic civil society for civility and democracy: is the growth of Muslim civil society conducive to democratization? Huntington's pessimistic prospect was in part based upon his observation of the fact that the increasing vitality of Muslim voluntary associations is feeding anti-Western tendencies among Muslims. Gellner's pessimism was also based on his view that *ummah* is an ideological community with no room for pluralism. This pessimistic view conjures up a scenario in which the growth of Muslim civil society will strengthen Muslim communalism *vis-à-vis* communalism of other religions, leading to inter-religious strife and eventual Balkanization, i.e. disintegration of the nation-state along religio-ethnic lines.

Robert Hefner has already warned of this danger in a challenging book edited by him entitled, *Democratic Civility*: "Civil association is necessary but never sufficient to guarantee a civil-democratic politics."[33] This warning is a serious one since we have seen in various places that religion-inspired civil society can easily degenerate into an agent of communal violence. Self-help and self-defence are separated only by a fine dividing line and

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the latter can easily escalate into a battle of life or death. Norton's qualification on civil society is also important. He asserts that "the existence of civil society is central to democracy… a vital and autonomous civil society is a necessary condition for democracy (though not a sufficient one)".[34]

The strengthening of Muslim civil society might not always lead to democratic civility. This is one of the critical points that needs to be examined. With this point in mind, the following is an overview of the contributions and discussions of both the Muslim and Japanese participants who took part in this project.

MESSAGES FROM SOUTHEAST ASIA

Activist Orientation

The SPF conference entitled "Islam and Civil Society: Messages from Southeast Asia" was held in November 1999 in Japan primarily as a learning session — an opportunity for the Japanese participants to listen to what Muslim intellectuals have to say on the subject and to foster greater understanding both personally and within academia. It also had a definite activist orientation, which was a result of a conscious decision. The choice was made in view of the fact that the participant's vision and self-perception were essential in understanding emerging civil society in Southeast Asia, about which little had been known before in Japan.

As stated in the Preface, preparation for the conference was undertaken in close co-operation with several key figures of civil society movements in the region. Among others, particular efforts were made in order to have articulate spokespersons for such influential Muslim organizations in the region as the Nahdlatul Ulama and Muhammadiyah in consultation with their top leaders.

As a result, all of the Southeast Asian contributors of the present volume have been selected from among not merely established scholars of Islam or Muslim societies but also from among experienced activists, or at least active participant observers, of civil society in their respective countries. It is expected that this activist orientation as well as the region-wide perspective of the present volume will lend it a certain distinctiveness. However, as the coverage of the present volume is still narrow in geography — only a half of the ten countries in the region are covered — and limited in topic compared to the vast richness of reality, it is hoped that this volume will serve as a starter for those who are concerned with civil society in Southeast Asia.

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Outline

The contributions of the Muslim participants are arranged in the following manner. Parts I and II concern Indonesia and Malaysia — the two Muslim majority countries in the region. Part III is on Muslim minority countries — Thailand, the Philippines and Singapore. Part IV contains three theoretical contributions on the relationship between Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia.

Part I centers on *reformasi* in Indonesia and the relationship of civil society with the state. The two contributors, Fajrul Falaakh and Amin Abdullah, belong to the top leadership of the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah respectively — the two gigantic Muslim organizations that have played decisive roles in the process of *reformasi*. One of the important points of their contributions is the fact that they delineate the visions and self-perceptions of their movements in a language commonly used in the social science discourse on civil society. Another important point is the fact that, as a result of *reformasi*, civil society leaders from these and other NGOs are now occupying key positions in the state structure as mentioned before. The reader will be able to learn how they perceive their new roles.

Fajrul Falaakh (Chapter 2) comes from a family of *kyai* (head of Islamic boarding school). He comments on the enormous transformation the NU has undergone since its birth in 1926 as a group of traditional religious scholars, *kyai* and *ulama*, up to the 1990s to become "the last bastion of civil society" that successfully counter-challenged the control of Soeharto.[35] According to Fajrul, the NU aspires to develop "a democratic civil society in Indonesia", which is basically "non-Islamic and non-military".[36] In addition to these bold statements, Fajrul presents the basic stance of NU on democracy, human rights, the state–religion relationship, majority–minority relationship and the NU's relationship with non-Islamic elements in civil society. This NU spokesperson delineates all these in terms of traditional religious teachings, especially of *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), as well as in the secular language of universal humanism.

As Miichi Ken has commented in the discussion, Fajrul's "civil society" (*masyarakat sipil*) is a secular one, rather than one corresponding to *masyarakat madani*, which implies Islamic genealogy and urban orientation as expounded by Habibie and ICMI Islamists.[37] It is clear that there is firm commitment of the NU to national integration on the basis of the state philosophy of Pancasila, which provides the solid foundation for the alliance between secular nationalists and the NU. Fajrul's possible answer to the question of the danger of communalism (or "exclusivism" in the

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language of Indonesian politics) mentioned above would be a repeated emphasis on the inclusive nature and tolerance of Islam that the NU is espousing.

Amin Abdullah was heading, at the time of the SPF conference, the Muhammadiyah's council for theological and legal deliberation (Majelis Tarjih), the most authoritative body dealing with moral and ethical judgements. He was elected at the National Congress of the Muhammadiyah held in July 2000 to the position of one of the top five people forming the daily executive core of the Muhammadiyah's central leadership. His contribution to this volume (Chapter 3) also places the Muhammadiyah in the context of the Western discourse on civil society. Amin is convinced of the Muhammadiyah's commitment to civic virtues and specifically mentions the following points: (a) the Muhammadiyah's dedication to community development which is always approached in the bottom-up fashion with local support, (b) democratic ways in which decisions are made internally in the organization of the Muhammadiyah, and (c) such civic virtues as "open-mindedness, tolerance, pluralism and relativism in religion" that the Muhammadiyah cherishes. According to Amin, all these constitute a firm guarantee that the organization cannot behave other than democratically.[38]

As Amin Abdullah admits, the participation of many of its cadres in the new political party, PAN (People's Trust Party), is an unprecedented challenge for the Muhammadiyah movement since the party started as a secular, open one. Yet, debate on its fundamental character is still going on with a strong pull to make it a political wing of the Muhammadiyah. At least personally and as a leader of the Muhammadiyah, however, Amin continues to advocate its political neutrality and social and cultural approach. He states clearly that the Muhammadiyah, as an NGO and voluntary association, will continue to strive "for embedding the values of civil society and civic virtues in society regardless of the position of its cadres *vis-à-vis* the government in power".[39]

Part II deals with the inter-relationship between Islamization and ethnic relations in the context of the development of civil society in Malaysia. Situations in Malaysia, where politics and ethnicity have been inseparable, have long justified the identification of Islam and Malayness as hegemonic ideology in the "multi-racial" state. However, the emergence of Muslim civil society with its implications for trans-ethnic egalitarianism has started to challenge its hegemony. Mohamad Abu Bakar, who has been close to the nerve centres of Islamic resurgence in Kuala Lumpur for many years, discusses his observations on this challenge (Chapter 4). According to

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him, the search for an "Islamic solution to communalism" has been going on for a long time. A series of attempts have been made by the resurgent Islamists to break through the established walls of communalism first via *dakwah* (proselytization) for conversion, but, having failed in this, then via the propagation of Islamic universalism, and lately through inter-civilizational dialogue. All these, ironically, have so far enhanced civil formation on the part of non-Muslims. Mohamad Abu Bakar is, however, not necessarily pessimistic about communalism since it also provides "an opportunity for civil society development". [40]

Sharifah Zaleha is concerned with the micro-process of the resurgence of Islam at the grassroots or kampung level in a new college town in Selangor where she is a resident observer (Chapter 5). The process takes the form of community development around a *surau* (prayer house). The local population consisted entirely of new migrant families with a high level of education. Having been distanced from their native villages by education and occupation and most of them being employed by a national university in the town, the young families of the new town have worked together to develop a new community physically, socially and spiritually. Leadership of a learned *ulama* (Islamic scholar) played a catalyst role. Without having formal affiliation with national organizations, the *surau*-centred activities have developed into a number of voluntary groups for education, social welfare and even traditional medical care. Sharifah believes that this type of *surau*-centred groups, mushrooming in new urban areas, can create the "space for participation and action for the residents of the new town outside the sphere of institutional party politics", thus enhancing civil society formation for Malay Muslims. [41] As pointed out by her discussant, Nakamura Hisako, Sharifah's observation is extremely informative as a case study of Islamic resurgence in a new urban environment but it is not certain yet whether her observation can be applied to other social contexts in the national perspective. [42]

Part III contains four contributions on Muslim minority situations, two on Thailand and one each for the Philippines and Singapore. Here again, the participant observer approach has been encouraged. Unlike most studies on Muslim minorities in Thailand that focus on the ethnic Malay Muslims in the South, the two contributors discuss the situations in Bangkok and Northeast, where they work as scholars as well as civil society activists respectively. Chaiwat Satha-Anand is a very popular teacher and productive scholar at a leading university in Bangkok. He is also an acknowledged expert in conflict resolution with whom the government as well as Muslim community leaders often seek consultation. With his informed knowledge

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of the ongoing academic discourse on civil society in the West, Chaiwat takes up the case of a well-established Cham Muslim community in Ban Krua, Bangkok (Chapter 6). The question raised is an important one and parallel to the one mentioned before: does civic action on the basis of ethnic identity (communalism) jeopardize or enhance the civility of the entire society? In the case of Ban Krua, the Muslim community's action to prevent the removal of a historic mosque and a cemetery known as *waqf* property for centuries from an urban development plan, seems to work "for all" transcending religious affiliation. [43] The Muslim protest is no longer seen as disruptive or subversive. As Omar Farouk comments,[44] the external environment for the Muslim minorities in Thailand has changed fundamentally since the days of military rule when basic human rights were severely curtailed. The Ban Krua Muslim community seems to be not only fully taking advantage of the changed external condition but also contributing positively to the widening of "democratic space" for the whole society.

Preeda Prapertchob's report contains a number of interesting details other than the main focus on Muslim voluntary activities in the Northeast, which has been reported in English perhaps for the first time (Chapter 7). One of the points he makes is that the mainstreaming of Muslim intellectuals in Thai politics in recent years — epitomized by the rise of Wan Muhammad Noor Matha to the post of the President of the National Assembly and that of Surin Pitsuwan to the post of the Minister for Foreign Affairs in the Chuan Cabinet — has been an indispensable part of the pro-democracy movement promoted by student activists on university campuses for several years. Mutual trust, or even comradeship, developed across religious differences among the new generation of Thai politicians seems to have been contributing to the change in the "external environment" mentioned by Omar for Ban Krua. Preeda's report on the TMSA (Thai Muslim Student Association) is also a testimony of the contribution of higher education to both Islamic resurgence and democratization observed in other parts of the Islamic world as well, as pointed out by Nejima Susumu in the discussion. [45] Nejima regards Dr Preeda's career path as a clear refutation of the prejudice that Islam is anti-modernization. [46]

Michael Mastura, our contributor on the Philippines, is a key figure not only in linking traditional Maguindanao Muslim polity with the Republic as a descendent of the Sultanate of Kudarat but also for his expertise as a Western-trained lawyer in institutionalizing Islamic law in the environment of Anglo-American law. He is also an Islamic jury-consultant in the true sense of the term. Having withdrawn from life as a Congressman, Mastura's

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efforts are now concentrated on building non-state institutions of Islam in public life at the extreme end of the political spectrum of the *ummah*, whose other end is the ARGs (armed revolutionary groups) according to his perception. His contribution to this volume is based on his recent experience in the management of a *waqf* foundation, Al Khairiah (Islamic Welfare Society) established for education and social welfare (Chapter 8). Tokoro Ikuya, Mastura's discussant who had had a chance to observe the operation of this foundation in Cotabato, was impressed by the fact it was delivering services to fill the basic social needs of the local communities.[47] According to Tokoro, the Al-Khairiah's presence is indispensable for the local community in providing education, social welfare, income-earning economic activities and a social safety network in general where the government was incapable of delivering these. [48]

Sharon Siddique, whose lasting contribution to reinvigorate Islamic studies in Southeast Asia after World War II is widely acknowledged, is a scholar of Muslim sociology and has contributed a report on the activities of the AMP (Association of Muslim Professionals), of which she is a founding member (Chapter 9). The AMP gives us a fresh image of Singaporean Muslims in contrast to the stereotypical one so far being held by outsiders, i.e., Malay Muslims as under-educated, unskilled, low-income, demoralized second-class citizens resigned to the fate but eager to attend to communal rituals and family obligations. In fact, the picture we obtain from Siddique is quite different: a new generation of Singaporean Muslims is well-educated, urbane, competitive in the forefront of the post-industrial market economy with a mastery in information technology — yet full of energy and passion to engage in voluntary activities for the cause of building "a model Muslim minority community". [49] Also, contrary to the outside image of Singapore being under the tight control of the single party government, social order and integration of this multi-ethnic island state seems to depend not so much on coercion but rather on "self-help" efforts of component ethnic groups to a large extent. Hence, the emphasis on synergies of the state and civil society from the government side. This situation invited a number of questions from Kaneko Yoshiki, Siddique's discussant, as well as from others concerning whether or not the soft-authoritarian regime is subcontracting the inefficient social welfare system to a number of ethnic civil organizations in the name of "self-help" and simultaneously keeping them under control within the perimeters it has set.[50] Siddique's answer is found in her contribution to this volume.

The three contributions in Part IV are theoretical. Nurcholish Madjid, one of the foremost intellectual leaders of "civil Islam" to borrow Hefner's

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latest terminology,[51] has given a concise recapitulation of his arguments for the notion of civil society (Chapter 10). He is convinced that humankind has a common history to which the contribution of Islam was quite significant. According to him, the notion of civil society or civilized society coined in the Constitution of Medina by Prophet Muhammad makes a genuine part of the common heritage of mankind. He believes that this awareness would provide a starting point for both Muslims and non-Muslims in supporting "the widest possible shaping and sharing of all values among all human beings".[52] Shuto Motoko, the discussant for Nurcholish's paper, acknowledging the persuasiveness of Nurcholish in presenting such Islamic values as justice, equality, and human dignity generally congruent with the requirements of democracy, still insists in her comments that one should not overlook the potential power and danger of Islam in post-Soeharto Indonesia for exacerbating regional separatism and ethnic fragmentation.[53] Shuto anticipates the development of severe internal conflicts among Islamic forces.

Osman Bakar, who has been one of the most active promoters of inter-civilizational dialogue based at the University of Malaya campus, has provided an introduction to the Malaysian Muslim's manifesto on inter-civilizational dialogue (Chapter 11). He has done this with two aspects in mind: Samuel Huntington on his right-hand side and the Iranian President Syed Mohammad Khatami on his left. Like Nurcholish, Osman believes that Islam is firmly based on the acknowledgement of pluralism as a God-given human condition. Islamic universalism addresses not only Muslims but also the whole of mankind. Human diversity requires efforts for "mutual acquaintance and understanding",[54] which is also a Qur'anic injunction. Osman warns of a Muslim illusion that one day the rest of the world would convert to Islam and urges the search for a possible common agenda, in which such post-modern issues as environmental and ecological ones loom large, and proposes principles to be followed for successful inter-civilizational dialogue. Nakanishi Hisae, who has been a close participant observer of the inter-civilizational dialogue advanced by President Khatami in Iran, welcomes Osman's proposal from Malaysia where she believes ethnic, religious and cultural pluralism is not only talked about but also successfully practised. Nakanishi wants to encourage preliminary discussions to clear common grounds between Muslim and non-Muslim worlds on such topics as human morality and human rights.[55]

Finally, Omar Farouk Bajunid, rounds up the discourses on Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia presented in the SPF conference and also introduces some additional issues (Chapter 12). He does this from the viewpoint of his strategic marginal-man position where the common

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experience of Southeast Asian Muslims, i.e. living in "interlocking and overlapping relationships with the other communities", is most typically embodied.[56] He is a Malaysian national from a family of Arab descent having lived in Southeast Asia for many generations, trained in a university in the United Kingdom, and now residing and teaching in the Japanese city of Hiroshima. He has expanded what he started as his comments on Chaiwat's contribution in this volume into a full chapter. He expounds the point that Muslim communities in Southeast Asia are not monolithic other than what he calls *tauhid*ic unity — a core Islamic belief — and living in and with multi-layered and multi-faceted plurality in everyday life. Southeast Asian Muslims are characterized by their adaptability and flexibility in this pluralistic situation. Omar attempts to explore implications of this situation for the growth of civil society in the region. The reader will benefit greatly from his artful presentation of Muslim discourses on civil society, some of which are covered by the contributions in this volume, in various social contexts of the region where they are taking place and examining them in a wider comparative framework of current Western discourses on the subject. It is also hoped that the reader will obtain from Omar's overview a coherent picture of where Islam and Muslim communities stand at present in terms of the development of civil society in the region and the problems and prospects they are likely to face in the future.

PROSPECTS FOR COMMON ACTION AGENDA

Direction of Islamic Civil Society in Southeast Asia in the 21st Century

As has been anticipated, all the contributions presented by the Muslim participants of the conference point to one conclusion: Islamization and democratization have been going hand in hand through the last decades of the twentieth century in Southeast Asia and these trends are converging to promote and strengthen Islamic civil society in the public life of most of the Southeast Asian countries as we head towards the twenty-first century regardless of the differences in the Muslim majority-minority situation. Islamic civil society has been one of the essential components in the recent popular demands for democratization. Conversely, democratization is enhancing a greater public role for Islamic civil society.

A critical question to be presented, as has been asked many times in different contexts in the conference and in various parts of this volume, is whether Islamic civil society that is, by definition, formed on the basis of

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the solidarity of Muslims as co-religionists, can commit itself to sharing such civic virtues as tolerance, pluralism and non-violence with non-Muslim fellow citizens in Muslim-majority countries. Is not Islam becoming another Trojan horse like German Nazism in the first half of the twentieth century that destroyed democracy from within after being popularly voted into power? In Muslim-minority countries, on the other hand, Islamic civil society may be a womb for Muslim separatism.

Answers given in the conference and documented in this volume all confirm the commitment of Islamic civil society they represent to democracy. The leader of the NU says that its commitment to pluralism and the universal brotherhood of humankind is genuine, buttressed by *fiqh*, the traditional Islamic science of jurisprudence. Here the writer was reminded of a statement made by the young Gus Dur — Abdurrahman Wahid, now the fourth President of Indonesia — many years ago that social ethics pursued by Islamic social movements like the Muhammadiyah and the NU should not be exclusive but inclusive in the sense of "binding internally and integrating externally".[57] Since the 1970s, Gus Dur has been consistent in practising this maxim — to be a good Muslim and a good citizen at the same time — and has endeavoured to transform the NU accordingly. Our top Muhammadiyah leader, on the other hand, argues that its long tradition of democratic principles employed in governing its organization internally is the surest guarantee that it cannot behave otherwise externally.[58] It is interesting to note that both the NU and Muhammadiyah have released a large number of their cadre to form the new political parties, PKB and PAN, both characterized by openness and religious pluralism. We will be able to see in the near future in what ways and to what extent those new parties will be contributing to the growth of democratic political culture in Indonesia.

One of our Malaysian contributors takes a different approach to the issue, as we have seen before. According to him, communalism may be a problem, but it also provides a solution to the problem. What, then, would be a decisive factor in changing the problem into a solution? To discuss this question fully is beyond the scope of the present volume. The present writer, however, would like to invite the reader to refer to an informative and thought-provoking book, *Civil Islam,* recently written by Robert Hefner.[59] There Hefner traces and analyses meticulously as well as boldly the genesis and the growth of internal discourses among Islamic activists of Soeharto's Indonesia along the spectrum between "civil Islam" and "regimist Islam" in relation to the state. The former is Islam that is committed to democratic virtues at the one end of the spectrum and the

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latter, Islam of those who subordinate Islam to political gains in a power game at the other.[60] Briefly, Hefner's answer to our question is that civil Islam needs a strong civilized and self-limiting state in which democratic culture prevails. Conversely, civil Islam can and should contribute to the growth of a strong civilized state by disciplining itself internally and externally.[61] Hefner's thesis seems to be relevant not only for Muslims in Indonesia but also for those in other countries in Southeast Asia and beyond. As for Indonesia itself, we are witnessing an extremely interesting situation in which one of the foremost leaders of "civil Islam", Gus Dur, is now occupying the highest position in the state structure, that of the presidency. Whether he is capable of "civilizing" the state from the top is one of the strategic questions facing Indonesia. His success or failure will have profound implications for the future of Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia.

Potential Contribution of Southeast Asian Islamic Civil Society to World Peace

Aswab Mahasin, another activist of "civil Islam" under the Soeharto regime once formulated a new face of Islam emerging through a social and cultural approach since the mid-1970s in the following terms: it is "an inclusive, contextual and open-minded Islam".[62] This statement, with growing self-confidence behind it, is indicative of Islam in Indonesia as well as elsewhere in Southeast Asia and is promoted by civil society. The self-confidence is significant in several ways. In spite of their numerical superiority in the entire Islamic world, Southeast Asian Muslims have been marginalized by the centres of the Islamic world, i.e. Arab countries. Muslims and non-Muslims took the sheer distance from the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina to mean that Islam in Southeast Asia was less authentic. A number of factors have changed this intellectual dependency of the periphery upon the centre in the Islamic world in recent decades.

Perhaps, one of the most important factors is the spread of education, especially higher education, in which a number of Islamic universities outside the Arab world have achieved high academic standards in traditional as well as modern Islamic scholarship. Those who have learned Islamic studies in the Western world have also achieved a high standard of scholarship and injected new blood into the Islamic world. Another factor is the ease of mass transportation and the increase in migrant labour through which the low to middle strata of Southeast Asian Muslim societies have been exposed to life in the Arab countries, especially in Saudi Arabia

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and the Gulf countries. Most of them have come home with the loss of the inferiority complex *vis-à-vis* the Arabs who hired them. Through the testimonies of those people, the image of the Arabs held by Muslims in Southeast Asia has changed to a great extent. A third factor is the remarkable economic development of the region. Prior to the 1997–98 crisis, the economies of Southeast Asian countries were experiencing unprecedented growth while the economies of the Middle East were stagnating.

These and other factors have contributed to the growth of the widespread self-confidence among the Muslims of Southeast Asia, especially among the intellectuals. When Southeast Asia with the largest Muslim population in the world overcomes its current economic difficulties and political instability and resumes sustainable growth, Islam in the region will become more visible than before. It is anticipated that more visibility and a more enhanced role will be accorded to Islam in public life in the region but with a definite Southeast Asian flavour: that is, "an inclusive, contextual and open-minded Islam".[63] This development will contribute greatly to creating a better environment for mutual understanding and co-operation between the Muslim and non-Muslim worlds on a global scale.

Prospects for Inter-Civilizational Dialogue and Common Action Agenda

Pioneering efforts by the University of Malaya for the promotion of inter-civilizational dialogue were highly appreciated by many.[64] Recently, inter-civilizational dialogue has been placed on the agenda for G-to-G relations centring on the United Nations. This is in line with the UN Year for Inter-Civilizational Dialogue 2001. The prospects for inter-civilizational dialogue between the Muslims and non-Muslims seem bright because of this UN initiative.

In order for the dialogue to become truly useful in terms of mutual understanding for peaceful co-existence among peoples across Muslim vs. non-Muslim lines of demarcation, it is suggested that talking together should not be confined to the G-to-G level. It should be developed into multiple layers and onto wider spheres, and not only for talking but also for joint actions. By multiple layers, what is suggested is contact between Muslims and non-Muslims at various levels, i.e. governments, NPOs, NGOs and POs. In other words, people from Track I to Track III levels should meet together in workshops, seminars, and conferences or even in joint action projects. It is also suggested that the involvement of the business world, or the participation of what is called corporate citizenship,

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should be considered. For business, there are products and services needed in both Muslim and non-Muslim worlds. An exchange of views and experiences should be expanded to include not only Muslim majority countries and their counterparts in non-Muslim countries, say Indonesia and Japan, but also Muslims in Muslim minority or non-Muslim countries and, vice versa, non-Muslims in Muslim majority countries. For those people are living in the forefront of inter-civilizational interface everyday.

Topics to be discussed in the inter-civilizational dialogue should be expanded from conventional ones of philosophy, history and culture, and those in the humanities, that had been the monopoly of experts in Islamic studies, to many other aspects of human life since Islam is concerned with the complete way of life. Therefore, dialogue should cover such technical and mundane matters as well as matters such as food and beverage, medicine, hygiene, architecture, city and environment planning, transport, management, marketing, advertisement, labour relations, legal matters including contracts, transactions, family law, and criminal law. By pursuing various preliminary activities, a truly meaningful common action agenda can be formulated and carried out in the near future.

It is heartening to observe that the Japanese Government has started to pursue "silk road diplomacy" in which a number of Muslim countries in the Eurasian continent will be included. It has also responded positively to the call for inter-civilizational dialogue proposed by President Khatami of Iran and adopted by the UN as an official activity. The seriousness of the Japanese Government is indicated by the fact that Foreign Minister Kono Yohei has established an advisory group of scholars on Islam with a view to incorporating their academic input into policy formulation.[65] A new age of Japan's approach with the Islamic world is going to take shape soon. NGOs, NPOs and philanthropic organizations in Japan are also beginning to pay their attention to their Muslim counterparts following a greater awareness of the situation, to whose development this conference has made a significant contribution. Messages from Muslims in Southeast Asia will be finding more receptive ears in Japan in the near future.

In this regard there are two practical suggestions the present writer would like to make to those non-Muslim activists and scholars engaged in the task of global networking of civil society including the Islamic one: (a) they need to pay more attention to the obvious fact that contemporary Islam in Southeast Asia, or any where else, is not monolithic, and (b) they need to be able to discern who to choose for their partner for co-operation in the trans-national networking of civil society. In other words, they need to do a great amount of home work as well as field work. It is hoped that

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the present volume represents just the beginning of more exciting works on Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia and beyond that lie ahead.

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[38] Statements in discussion.

[39] See Chapter 3, p. 51 of this volume.

[40] See Chapter 4, p. 73 of this volume.

[41] See Chapter 5, p. 84 of this volume.

[42] Nakamura Hisako, "Comments on 'Islamization and the Emerging Civil Society' by Dr Sharifah Zaleha" (written comments).

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[58] See Chapter 3 of this volume.

[59] Hefner, *Civil Islam,* op. cit.

[60] Ibid, p. 36.

[61] Ibid., Chapter Eight, Conclusion.

[62] Editor's note to the "Special Issue on Islam in Indonesia: In Search of a New Image", *PRISMA: The Indonesian Indicator,* no. 35 (March 1985), p. 2.

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PART I

THE INDONESIAN EXPERIENCE
Civil Society versus the State

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2

Nahdlatul Ulama and Civil Society in Indonesia

Mohammad Fajrul Falaakh

INTRODUCTION

The Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) is the largest Muslim organization in Indonesia today. It was founded as a religious voluntary organization in Surabaya, East Java, in January 1926. It took part in the modernization of the Indonesian Muslim community by involvement in the development of education, social welfare, and economic activities. It also took part in the struggle for Indonesia's independence in 1945.

Having become a special member of the Islamic political party, the Masyumi, in 1945, the NU became an independent political party during the 1952–73 period and, subsequently, one of the important components and organizational supporters of the United Development Party (PPP) in 1973–83. As a political force, the NU was depicted as opportunistic and accommodative.[1] It was seen to have no vision on national integration, economic modernization, and foreign policy issues. [2] Unsurprisingly, as the NU was no longer a political party, it was also seen as aspiring to a limited version of citizenship such as those that prevailed in the old-style patrimonial state.[3]

While important social and political changes occurred in the country, the New Order regime in Indonesia (1966–98) continued to be seen as an authoritarian regime. Interestingly, the NU was eventually considered to have aspired to developing a democratic civil society in Indonesia that was basically non-Islamic and non-military. [4] Due to its success in counter-challenging the government-backed actions to ouster its general chairman, the NU was also pictured as "the last bastion of civil society" in Indonesiâ.

Such comments on this *ulama*-based organization are intriguing. How has an organization — founded by traditional religious scholars — transformed itself from a socio-religious organization into a political party,

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and then returned to its origins by incorporating a blend of new ideas such as democratization and the development of civil society? It is also interesting to look at the NU's position during the student protests in March and May 1998 that resulted in the resignation of President Soeharto.

This chapter is an effort to explain the emerging religious discourse within the NU that reflects its commitment to the development of democracy and the flourishing of civil society. It touches on the NU's non-revolutionary involvement, as an element of Indonesian civil society, in the current process of political reform in Indonesia. Lastly, the NU's participation in the 1999 general elections, through voter education and elections monitoring, is also briefly discussed.

Several central ideas are first explained. First, the NU has elaborated the conceptual basis of the relationship between the state ideology, Pancasila, and Islam. This issue has been debated since Indonesia proclaimed its independence in 1945, and sometimes prompted many Muslim movements in the archipelago to aspire to the establishment of an Islamic state. The NU's conceptualization is proof that traditional Islam has been able to respond to a modern ideology. It also proves that the NU could participate, again, in reaching a significant political consensus on a national basis.

Second, the NU refers to one of the substantial ideas of Shariah as the basis for social thought to promote common good — known as the idea of *rahmatan lil 'alamin* (mercy on the universe). The elaboration of this idea is understood as the minimum requirement for respecting and protecting human rights. This is an obvious example of the development of traditional Islamic teachings and also exemplifies the NU's interplay with universal ideas.

Third, and corollary to the second, the NU is concerned more with the economic conditions of the already vulnerable Indonesian people during the current economic crisis. This also reflects the NU's contemplation of the difficulty facing Indonesia in the dual transition of proceeding with economic recovery and furthering political reform.

Finally, the NU and the Indonesian people are now facing a delicate situation in the form of a dual transition of economy and politics as mentioned above. As a religious organization and an element of civil society, the NU has to engage in a difficult but unavoidable situation. The NU has formed a political party (Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa [PKB], or the National Awakening Party) — which is an independent entity — and was involved in enhancing the credibility of the June 1999 general election.

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ULAMA, RELIGION, AND IDEOLOGY

On the relationship between religion and ideology, that is, Islam and the state ideology, Pancasila, the NU considers that ideology and religion are not interchangeable. Ideology derives its logic from human thoughts and history, while religion is believed to have derived its teachings from revelation. In heated debates during the national conference of *ulama* (*Munas 'Alim-ulama*) in 1983, the NU decided on Pancasila as its sole basis (*asas tunggal*). Pancasila is not contradictory to Islam, the first principle of which is *tauhid* (strict monotheism) according to Islamic belief.[6]

The NU has thus become the first religious and non-governmental organization (NGO) to declare Pancasila as the sole ideology in Indonesia. An implication of the NU's opinion is that Pancasila cannot be developed and implemented without absorbing the aspirations of the society, including the Muslim community that the NU partly represents. The de-étatism of ideological discourse that the NU demands certainly requires a nationwide acceptance of Pancasila as an open ideology, where citizens can contribute their ideas and preferences to enrich the understanding and the implementation of Pancasila.

To have such contributions, the NU needs substantial efforts to disseminate a sense of responsible citizenship within its circle. The NU's constitution of 1984 clearly states that the participation of the NU in a "national struggle", which is to build a just and prosperous national (not exclusively Islamic) society, is a necessary step. Accordingly, the consciousness of the NU members to become good and responsible citizens — who will promote rights and duties *vis-à-vis* the state and their fellow citizens — must be developed and strengthened. It is understood that this sense of citizenship will contribute to the transformation of the Indonesian patrimonial state into a modern non-absolute one.

TOWARDS A PROSPEROUS SOCIETY

To face future challenges and survive under new circumstances, the NU requires the reinterpretation of its religious discourse. It is here that we find a notable challenge that may have profound implications for the future. For in achieving its objectives, which is "the implementation of Islamic teachings in Indonesian society" in harmony with the prevailing social and cultural conditions (called *pribumisasi*, or nativization, of Islam), the NU promotes the accomplishment of common good for the whole

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society. It should not become a sectarian organization although the NU is definitely a Muslim one.

According to Shariah which the NU adheres to, there are five basic principles of common good (or public interests) formulated as basic necessities of human beings.[7] These necessities are religiously sanctioned and protected. They are formulated in the following:

(1) the protection of religious consciousness and observances (*hifzh al-din*);
(2) the protection of life (*hifzh al-nafs*);
(3) the protection of thought and freedom of opinion (*hifzh al-'aql*);
(4) the protection of property (*hifzh al-amwal*); and
(5) the right to enter into marriage and the protection of reproductive rights (both are included under the rubric of *hifzh al-nasl*).

This concept of common good — a parallel and perhaps similar idea to the universal principles of human rights — must be respected, protected, and observed by the Muslims.

Interestingly enough, and this appears to be neo-modern outlook, these principles are taken from a 1,000-year-old concept contained in the literature of Islamic jurisprudence and is known as *kulliyyat al-khams* (simply "five basic necessities"). They are taught within the NU's intellectual tradition transmitted in *pondok pesantren* (religious boarding schools). This concept was invoked at the deliberation of the religious committee during the NU's 1994 Muktamar (National Assembly), and understood as *mashlahah 'ammah* (literally means common good or public interests). At the NU's national conference of *ulama* (Musyawarah Nasional 'Alim-Ulama) in 1997, the concept was discussed and elaborated as embodying human rights principles in Islam (*huquq al-insaniyah fi al-Islam*).

From an economic viewpoint, the NU's constituents consist of small and largely rural-based entrepreneurs — what C. Geertz calls a bazaar economy. The NU is committed to help these constituents under the broad concept of *harakah ta'awun* (co-operative movements or joint efforts in the economy). Both the NU's constitutions of 1994 and 1999 enjoin distributive economies through the establishment of co-operatives. Integrating small and medium enterprises (SMEs) into wider economic efforts is regarded as crucial to the continuation of Indonesia's economic growth and equitable distribution of economic opportunities in the future.

Considering the nature of the Indonesian economy marked with "crony businesses" (or ersatz capitalism), cartel-like businesses, and state-backed monopolies, it is certainly difficult to even develop independent small

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enterprises in Indonesia. Helping to solve this problem will address one of the impediments to integrating SMEs into Indonesia's economic development. It is hoped that this principle will enhance the chance of improving the personal income of the majority of the population, thereby giving them a fair chance of being involved in the market-oriented economy.

Such a principle is in line with the NU's vision of "three brotherhoods", which are *ukhuwwah Islamiyah*, *ukhuwwah wathaniyyah*, and *ukhuwwah basyariyah*, or brotherhood among Muslims, brotherhood among fellow citizens, and brotherhood among human beings, and of co-operative efforts (*harakah ta'awun*).[8]

During the March-May student movements in 1998, the Central Board of the NU did invite all Indonesians, including the NU members, to refrain from seeking scapegoats or from blaming any national strategic group for current problems in Indonesia. The NU urged its members and officials to unite and see through the divisive rumours and rhetoric that compromised the above-mentioned "three brotherhoods".

The NU advocated, in no uncertain terms, toleration of all ethnic and religious minorities in Indonesia. Ethnic and religious violence will only serve to exacerbate the acute problems facing Indonesia, therefore endangering national integration and the unity of heterogeneous Indonesian society.

THE NU AND CIVIL SOCIETY

The NU is a civic organization based on Islamic teachings, and a part of Indonesia's civil society. Other elements of the country's civil society are various forms of local governance such as, *banjar* in Bali, *kerapatan nagari* in Minangkabau, *trah* (dynasties) in Java, *yayasan* (foundations), NGOs (*lembaga swadaya masyarakat* or LSM), churches, or *majelis ta'lim* (Muslim religious circles). Such elements of civil society act as links between the state and society, or in "the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, largely self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by legal order or set of standard rules".[9]

However, in the world's fourth most populous country, the New Order regime was known to have controlled virtually all aspects of life. The country's highest political institution — People's Consultative Assembly (Majelis Permusyawaratan Rakyat or MPR) — was apparently docile, while the Indonesian Parliament (the House of People's Representatives or Dewan Perwakilan Rakyat or DPR) was in the habit of rubber-stamping the executive policy proposals. The government also routinely screened

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opposition candidates and policies, and public political participation was contained or, at best, mobilized through the government's corporatist strategies.

The latter policy was supported by the "floating mass" concept, thereby eliminating the outreach of political parties from the grassroots level. An unbalanced situation emerged, as the ruling Golkar (Golongan Karya) Party had the advantage of being backed by civil servants and the military, down to the village level. Moreover, the indigenous democratic practices prevailing at the village level — what the Dutch scholars on Indonesian customary law called *dorpsgemeenschap* (literally "village republics") — were contained through the introduction of the government-controlled institutions called Village Community Resilience Board (Lembaga Ketahanan Masyarakat Desa or LKMD).

Thus, the dynamics of the New Order were heavily marked by the dual elements of bureaucratic authoritarianism and state corporatism. The implication was that there was a concentration of power in the President, which was channelled through an executive-heavy Constitution of 1945. There were also constraints on public participation in political decision-making. All of this partly explained the endurance of Golkar and the long-serving Soeharto, who stayed in power for thirty-two years.

This political condition also created a void, for Indonesians were limited in gathering information about democratic practices and engaging constructively in political dialogue and civic action. The NU certainly faced difficult situations, one of which was caused by the fact that its followers were predominantly rural-based, as they are. What has been the NU's role since it officially returned to being a social and religious organization in 1983?

In reference to various models of civil society, it seems that the NU can be placed under the Czechoslovakian model in particular, and central-eastern Europe in general, that promotes cultural parallelism. [10] Taking advantage of the limited openness of the Indonesian New Order authoritarian regime, the NU developed and disseminated alternative public discourses. This so-called socio-cultural strategy needs long-term effort by employing social and cultural potentials available within the NU, such as reinterpreted and revitalized religious teachings and traditions, and the utilization of traditional boarding schools (*pondok pesantren*).

To be involved in the long-term democratic transition and consolidation through a civil society, the NU certainly needs to develop its world-view. Involvement in strengthening national integration, and maintaining pluralism and toleration in Indonesia, as well as struggling to achieve a

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prosperous or welfare society in a global context, the NU has to admit that to have an "open society" is inevitable. This means that, first, the NU has to develop its religious discourse by absorbing new ideas originating from everywhere, in addition to reinterpreting and revitalizing Islam.

This is not a new phenomenon among Muslims and NU followers. Such cultural borrowings happened in the early period of Muslim history, especially during the "golden age" of Islam. The NU itself has rich experience in absorbing foreign ideas and institutions — such ideology as nationalism, modern education, family planning and reproductive rights, political party, and even *pesantren* (which perhaps is of Hindu origin).

Indeed, rather than accommodating new ideas *in toto*, the NU applies a strategy deriving from its rich "legal maxims" (*qawa 'id al-fiqhiyah*), namely *al-muhafazhah 'ala 'l-qadimi 'l-sshalih wa 'l-akhzhu bi 'l-jadidi 'l-ashlah* (meaning "preserving previous good traditions and selecting better new ideas"). This is also apparent, for instance, when the NU issued its religious opinions on common good and human rights mentioned above.

Second, as expounded by the late Rais 'Am (President of the NU's legislative council) in 1987, the NU promotes the aforementioned "three brotherhoods". As a consequence, not only is it important that the NU works together with various Muslim organizations or co-nationalists, but it also has to be involved in making joint efforts and co-operating with global society. Hence, the NU has to commit to social pluralism and tolerance at various levels.

Third, the NU is transforming its classical religious discourse by expounding and emphasizing its democratic elements. These elements are found in the concept of *akhlaq al-karimah* (civil manners) in politics or civic virtues. These values are implemented in conjunction with the promotion of civic competence at the local level of governance throughout the country. They include the respect for civil and political rights, the protection of vulnerable groups within society (or the preference for the disadvantaged), and the efforts to achieve common good.

It is here that the NU participates in building an independent civil society in Indonesia. For as a religious organization, the NU is able to be involved in the public sphere by mainly concentrating at the level of social and cultural politics — differentiated from power politics that focuses on the efforts to secure and concentrate on political power. Therefore, the NU can be involved in strengthening the roots of political life, that is, by internalizing civic virtues.

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THE 1999 GENERAL ELECTION

The NU's involvement in the 1999 general election was threefold. First, it established its own political party, namely the Partai Kebangkitan Bangsa (PKB, or National Awakening Party). PKB ranked fourth in receiving popular votes after the Partai Demokrasi Indonesia-Perjuangan (PDI-P, or Indonesian Democratic Party-Struggle) of Megawati Soekarnoputri, the Golkar Party, and the United Development Party (PPP). This topic is not discussed in this chapter.

Second, many of the NU's institutions and autonomous bodies participated in voter education activities. [11] They co-operated with other organizations, such as the Muhammadiyah youths and NGOs involved in human rights and legal aid activities. Such activities helped voters to better understand their rights and choices in the elections.

Third, as members of civil society in Indonesia were eager to watch the elections, the NU's institutions and autonomous bodies were actively involved in election monitoring.[12] The NU had an advantage of having its outreach down to the remote village level throughout the country, where election frauds and irregularities had been found under the New Order elections since 1971.

Thus, the NU participated in establishing the credibility of the 1999 general election. Having succeeded in conducting the June 1999 elections and electing the President and Vice-President, Indonesia has now become the third largest democracy in the world. It is certainly too early to say that such achievements will automatically lead to democratic consolidation. However, it is obvious that a country that is predominantly Muslim has contributed to the new wave of democratization in the world.

In short, the NU is involved in the strengthening of civil society by concentrating on the social and cultural aspects of politics, rather than on the dimension of power politics. The NU is involved in promoting national integration, preserving pluralism, strengthening toleration, and achieving a prosperous welfare society measured according to the above-mentioned ideas of common good and human rights principles. By so doing, the NU is involved in the development of an independent civil society in Indonesia through about 330 branches at the district level, more than 6,000 *pondok pesantren*, and 21,000 schools all over the country. The NU also participated in Indonesia's recent democratic transition process, being involved in various ways in the first democratically-held elections after thirty-two years of the New Order authoritarian rule.

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Notes

1. Ken Ward, *The 1971 Elections in Indonesia: An East Java Case Study* (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1974).
2. Benedict Anderson, "Religion and Politics in Indonesia since Independence", in *Religion and Social Ethos in Indonesia*, by B. R. O'G Anderson, M. Nakamura, and M. Slamet (Clayton, Victoria: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University, 1977), pp. 21–32.
3. Kuntowijoyo, *Paradigma Islam Agenda Untuk Aksi* (Bandung: Mizan, 1994), p. 226
4. Douglas Ramage, *Politics in Indonesia: Democracy, Islam and the Ideology of Tolerance* (London: Routledge, 1995).
5. Daniel Dhakidae, "Nahdlatul Ulama, Politik dan Demokrasi", a speech delivered on the celebration of Abdurrahman Wahid's re-election as NU's chairman, 1994 (text by courtesy of Daniel Dhakidae).
6. On the NU's adoption of Pancasila as its sole basis, see further in Einar M. Sitompul, *NU dan Pancasila: Sejarah dan Peranan NU Dalam Perjuangan Umat Islam Dalam Rangka Penerimaan Pancasila Sebagai Satu-satunya Asas* (Jakarta: Sinar Harapan, 1989). For an account on the issue by an NU writer, particularly using Islamic legal perspective (*fiqh*), see M. Ali Haidar, *Nahdlatul Ulama dan Islam di Indonesia: Pendekatan Fikih dalam Politik* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 1994), pp. 279–97.
7. Readers interested in Shariah legal philosophy on the issue may consult, e.g., Mohammad Hashim Kamali, *Principles of Islamic Jurisprudence* (Selangor, Malaysia: Peladuk Publications, 1989), Ch. XIII. See also M. Khalid Masood, *Islamic Legal Philosophy: A Study of Abu Ishaq al-Shatibi's Life and Thought* (New Delhi: International Islamic Publishers, 1989), especially Chs. 4–5 and 7.
8. The principle of "three brotherhood" was coined by the late president of NU's legislative council, Achmad Shiddiq. See an introductory discussion by Greg Barton, "Islam, Pancasila and the Middle Path of Tawassuth", in *Nahdlatul Ulama, Traditional Islam and Modernity in Indonesia*, edited by Greg Barton and Greag Fealy (Clayton, Victoria: Monash Asia Institute, Monash University, 1996), Ch. 5.
9. Larry Diamond, "Rethinking Civil Society: Toward Democratic Consolidation", *Journal of Democracy* 5 (July 1994).

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[10] Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1992), Ch. 1, especially pp. 69–82. Steven Lukes, "Introduction", in Vaclav Havel, *The Power of the Powerless: Citizens against the State in Central-Eastern Europe* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1985).

[11] See in general United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Transition to Democracy: Report on the UNDP Technical Assistance Programme for the 1999 Indonesian General Elections*(Jakarta: UNDP, 1999).

[12] Ibid. Also, for instance, see A. Malik Haramain and Muhammad Nurhuda, eds., *Mengawal Transisi: Refleksi Atas Pemantauan Pemilu '99* (Jakarta: PMII and UNDP, 2000).

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3

Muhammadiyah's Experience in Promoting Civil Society on the Eve of the 21st Century

M. Amin Abdullah

INTRODUCTION

In reviewing approaches in the study of civil society, Robert Hefner has discerned two patterns:

> Some studies on civil society emphasize one of these two sets of variables [structural and cultural] as opposed to another. … [S]ome adopt a strongly *culturalist* approach as if problems of democracy and civility were primarily matters of getting cultural discourse right. By contrast, other studies emphasize *structural* and organizational variables, as if civility and democracy were the natural product of a certain kind of organization. [Emphasis added.][1]

This chapter argues that the Muhammadiyah, as an Islamic social-religious organization in Indonesia, cannot be aptly explained by this binary and dichotomous approach. The most critical point in understanding civility and democracy concerns not one, but both, of these variables — not in isolation, but as a "socio-genetic" or dialectical interaction, and even as something interwoven between both sides.

There are various definitions of civil society. The essence of civil society, as once defined by Robert Hefner, emphasizes "material prosperity, … tolerance of dissenting viewpoints, limits on state power, the freedom to express their views and choosing their own way of life". [2] Meanwhile, Peter Berger emphasizes the notion of pluralism rather than secularism. It should be noted beforehand, that the concept of civil society surfaced and

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suddenly became popular around the 1980s, and was inspired and provoked by the decline of almost all socialist regimes in Eastern Europe. [3] It is rather difficult, actually, to directly relate this concept of civil society with the Muhammadiyah's existence. It is my belief, however, that the concept of civil society is not limited to the late eighties and nineties. In the case of Indonesian Muslims, this awareness came in the early twentieth century. It was exemplified by the establishment of such non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as the Muhammadiyah in 1912, the Nahdlatul Ulama in 1926, and many others around the same time. It is obvious, however, that the social and cultural context in Indonesia then was totally different from that which existed in the 1980s in Eastern Europe, or even from that of France in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the idea of civil society first emerged. Without going into a comparison, I would like to delineate the Muhammadiyah's experience as a modern Islamic movement in Southeast Asia in promoting and implementing those civic virtues in Indonesian society.

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AS THE BASIS OF THE MUHAMMADIYAH'S ORGANIZATIONAL ACTIVITIES

The Muhammadiyah, since 1912 when it was founded, has been well known as an Islamic NGO, as well as a modern Islamic organization. [4] Its main concern and target has been community development. From the era of Dutch colonialism to the period of national independence consisting of three subsequent regimes, namely, the Old Order (1945–65), the New Order (1966–98) and the order of Reformation (1998–), the Muhammadiyah has firmly maintained the original vision of the organization, and consistently pursued this basic concern.

According to its statute, a new branch *(ranting/cabang)* of this organization cannot be formally established by a top-down approach. Instead, a bottom-up approach is necessary. Newly-founded branches at the village, district, and municipality levels anywhere in Indonesia can only be formally recognized by the headquarters of the organization if, and only if, they are strongly supported by their initial members in the areas from where these members originate.

Actual activities in the social and cultural sphere, such as education, economy, health care, poor and orphan care, and so forth, are the prerequisites that need to be fulfilled first by the members of a new branch before registering it at the headquarters. This policy and regulation illustrates that the existence of the Muhammadiyah provides concrete social and

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cultural benefits and, more fundamentally, is supported and recognized by its members and sympathizers from among the local people. [5]

The serious commitment of the Muhammadiyah to empower society and to promote community development can be seen nationally by the reluctance and unwillingness of its central board to change its social and cultural orientation to a political one, an idea that has surfaced in public discussions from time to time.

Immediately following the fall of Soeharto's regime in May 1998, many new political parties sprung into existence rapidly. No less than forty-eight political parties were formally admitted by the transitional government to participate in the last general election held in June 1999. During this critical period, the Muhammadiyah had an opportunity to change its fundamental nature from a social and cultural movement to a political party in its annual meeting *(Tanwir)* held in Semarang in July 1998. Nevertheless, the participants of this annual meeting, who came from all twenty-seven provinces in Indonesia, unanimously refused to alter the basic orientation of the Muhammadiyah movement. An important decision was taken at that meeting, however, where the participants agreed to allow members of the Muhammadiyah to personally join, and even establish, a new political party, on the condition that this political party has no formal connection whatsoever with the Muhammadiyah, either institutionally or organizationally.[6]

Once again, eighty-seven years after its foundation, the Muhammadiyah movement has exhibited its consistency. The vision and mission of this religious non-governmental movement remain social and cultural. Social and cultural activities always occupy high priority. Spreading the programme of social and religious education within Muslim communities *(dakwah jemaah)*, advocating a peaceful family life *(keluarga sakinah)*, and peaceful and prosperous village life*(qaryah thayyibah)* are consistently promoted. All these underline the point that the Muhammadiyah is highly committed to a community-based programme. All activities are initiated, planned, formulated, implemented, and evaluated at the community level.

Now, what is the relationship or interrelationship between Islam and the Muhammadiyah in Indonesia? In the Muhammadiyah's view it is clear that Islam is the source of motivation and inspiration. Such Islamic values as justice, equality, diligence, honesty, entrepreneurship, and so forth constitute the Muhammadiyah's inner spirit and living ethos. Islam offers guidance to the faithful to carry out worldly activities so that they are executed and implemented in the way enjoined by God. In this sense, "Islam is taken as the cultural motivation to enhance a social reform and

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not a political one".[7] Islam, like other world religions, provides guidance to its followers to draw up changes and to transform their environments towards a better life.[8]

In this context, the Muhammadiyah can be said to have played a vital role in promoting and enhancing the idea of civil society *(masyarakat madani)* from its early existence to the present time. Since its beginning, this Islamic organization has never considered Islam as political. From this fundamental standpoint, it paves the way for the Muhammadiyah to build a community that is autonomous, independent from the hegemony of state, democratic, critical, inclusive, and transparent, regardless of the nature of the ruling government.

PROMOTING CIVIL SOCIETY THROUGH CULTURAL AND STRUCTURAL STRATEGY

It is my understanding that not all activities inspired and enshrined by the teachings and the doctrine of a religion are defensive, apologetic, or anti-democratic. Religious activities can be formally and structurally established on the basis of good management, and effective and efficient organization. The Muhammadiyah is a case in point. In this case, the classical philosophical debate concerning the primacy of reason over revelation, and vice versa, on matters relating to the problem of democracy cannot explain the whole story. Reason stands for the universality and inclusiveness, while revelation stands for particularity and exclusiveness.[9] From the Muhammadiyah's viewpoint, the twin pillars of reason and revelation have an important and vital role. These twin pillars have created ways to keep a unique balance between public and private matters, universal and particular interests, and individual and public morality.[10] They have also made it possible for the characteristics of civil society to be maintained.[11] The traditional type of charismatic and paternalistic leadership has been slowly, but surely, relegated and substituted by the modern type of democratic leadership. Also, due to the belief in these twin pillars, the Muhammadiyah has strongly and consistently advocated the idea and the value of open-mindedness, democracy, tolerance, pluralism, and even relativism in religious understanding.[12]

In that sense, the social and cultural activities and track-record of the Muhammadiyah as a modern Islamic movement in Indonesia are totally different from that which originated from and is inspired by the Middle East. Almost all researchers on Islam in Indonesia agree that the establishment of "organization" most distinctly characterized Islam in the early twentieth century.[13] The Muhammadiyah conducted its social and

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cultural activities through the media of a modern organization. Civic values which are strongly linked with the idea of civil society, including elections in choosing the leadership of the organization, transparency, accountability, and meritocracy are continuously and intensively nurtured and implemented among the cadres of the modern Muslim organization in Indonesia.

As an illustration, the Egyptian reformist, Muhammad Abduh, had a brilliant idea when he tried to accommodate the classical interpretation of the Qur'an with its modern one. Nevertheless, Abduh and his colleagues only focused their primary attention on constructing only the theory, while not paying attention to that related to the praxis. He never established a strong organization or social institution as the Muhammadiyah did. When the Muhammadiyah decided on its community-based orientation, as clarified above, nobody expected that this organization would flourish as widely as we can see in Indonesia today.

The strength of the Muhammadiyah's community-based movement lies in its ethos found in the mechanism of modern organization. The Muhammadiyah is not merely concerned with theoretical, textual, or "high" tradition. It diligently and continuously works within the practical, contextual, or "low" tradition. It believes that organization is a vital tool in all activities of life, even more so in the modern era of human history. Working in an organizational system means that human, natural, and monetary resources are needed to back it up. Besides, it should have a goal, programme, planning, and networks. More importantly, how those plans and networks are operationalized and implemented into the real social activities should be regularly evaluated by its members and the community in general. According to the Muhammadiyah, organization and programmes or activities are like two sides of the same coin. The experience of working structurally or organizationally is typical for the Muhammadiyah. Socialization of ideas and programmes from the headquarters to the branches and grassroots members of the Muhammadiyah throughout Indonesia, and vice versa, are carried out smoothly and rapidly because of the fact that this organization works on the basis of structural mechanism.

NGOs or Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat (LSM) are often regarded as one of the important pillars for establishing civil society. It is also well known that NGOs usually have efficient, creative, and innovative organizations, are adaptable to a changing situation and skilful in matters empowering society, especially at the grassroots level. Nevertheless, NGOs of the conventional type cannot escape from a certain weakness. Few believe that NGOs can continue to spread their ideas and programmes

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over time and to all regions of a state if they do not co-operate with the government, which has a functional authority over the entire bureaucratic network in implementing policy.

It is undeniable that the Muhammadiyah, as a religiously-inspired NGO, is strongly motivated to empower society as do other NGOs in general. The capability of NGOs to nurture and establish a community-based or grassroots level organization is undeniable. Not all NGOs are, however, developed on a good and solid structural mechanism. Many of them are not very strong in co-ordinating and controlling their programmes that can be promoted continuously over a long period of time. The Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama, with their respective massive members and central boards of organization, can avoid these difficulties.

The Muhammadiyah is different from other NGOs. Working with a modern style of transformative management and organizational experience, the Muhammadiyah is familiar with and close to the mechanism of state administration. Although the Muhammadiyah movement pursues its cultural and social activities autonomously, in the process of implementing these social, cultural, and educational activities, it works together with the state. For example, when it initiates the building of a school, university, religious endowment, or hospital it must work hand in hand with the government through the Department of Education and Culture or the Department of Health.

In other words, the Muhammadiyah knows when it should behave freely and autonomously, when it must co-operate with the government to execute its programmes, and when it must criticize the government policy. Over a long period of its history, the Muhammadiyah has been able to work with integrity by adjusting itself *vis-à-vis* these three functions simultaneously. If an observer points out that the Muhammadiyah is close enough to the state, not because of its inherent nature but due to the fact that some of its social and cultural activities are in conformity with the government's programme, he is not totally mistaken. These parallels and similarities oblige the Muhammadiyah to work hand in hand with the government without negating its own vision and mission as an Islamic NGO.

AMIEN RAIS AS A SYMBOL AND PERSONIFICATION OF THE MUHAMMADIYAH MOVEMENT IN EMPOWERING CIVIL SOCIETY

Using the above-described methodology and strategy in formulating and engineering social, cultural, and religious activities and programmes, the Muhammadiyah cannot avoid direct contact with political issues of the

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country. On the eve of the twenty-first century, the pattern and the style of the Muhammadiyah in expressing its political aspiration are personified in the figure of Amien Rais, its general chairman from 1995 to 1999.[14] Since his student days, he has been a genuine activist in the Muhammadiyah. He was a chief of Ikatan Mahasiswa Muhammadiyah (IMM), an autonomous organization under the Muhammadiyah, which organizes and co-ordinates students' activities around universities, institutes, and academies.

After graduating from the Gadjah Mada University in Yogyakarta, he was appointed a lecturer in the Department of Political Science at the same university. He then received his doctorate from Chicago University in the United States of America. Finally, he obtained his professorship in political science from Gadjah Mada University. Although he is a government official, he has been free to be a member, and even to chair, an NGO, namely the Muhammadiyah.

Since the 1970s, he has been very active in the Muhammadiyah central board as an outspoken expert pointing out inappropriate policy of the government. In 1980, when he was elected a vice-president of the Muhammadiyah, he launched severe critiques towards Soeharto's rule, which he regarded as the symbol of state hegemony over the citizens. He contributed greatly to the struggle for the empowerment of society, resulting in the stepping down of Soeharto and the fall of the New Order in May 1998, a regime that dominated the country politically, socially, culturally, and economically for thirty-two years (1966–98).

Amien Rais received approval from the Muhammadiyah at its annual meeting *(Tanwir)* held in July 1998 in Semarang to grant him temporary resignation from his position as its general chairman. He then set up a new political party called Partai Amanat Nasional (PAN, or National Mandate Party), which is basically an open political party, not exclusively for Muslims only.[15]

The Muhammadiyah's recent experience in promoting and empowering civil society has resulted in the above-mentioned formal permission to allow its members to be more seriously involved in the field of practical and real politics, no longer limited to the area of "high" politics. Those political activists' ultimate goal is to demand a greater, and more significant, role for citizens to manage their own basic needs, and thus contribute more towards the prosperity of all citizens in the country. Through the general election held in June 1999, this Islamic NGO has sent a considerable number of its members to the House of People's Representatives via PAN and other parties. The time is right for such members to exercise their roles and initiatives in reforming the old paradigm of state hegemony into a democratic one.

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DILEMMAS OF THE MUHAMMADIYAH MOVEMENT AS AN NGO AFTER ITS SUCCESS IN THE POLITICAL ARENA

The title of this section is rather questionable. NGOs or voluntary associations, by definition, must stand outside the governmental bureaucracy. The writer considers, however, this is not the case in Indonesia. The two largest Islamic NGOs in Indonesia, namely the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama, are unique phenomena. Genuinely, they are NGOs consistently striving for civil society. Nevertheless, they have direct access to the ruling government as a sparring partner. They do not regard themselves as, and do not act as, an opposition party in the western political sense since their respective statutes do not define themselves as political parties. This has been especially so for the Muhammadiyah throughout its history, whereas the Nahdlatul Ulama became a political party between 1952 and 1973. In spite of this, the voice, the advocacy, and the message issued and delivered by these two Islamic NGOs have unfailingly left a huge impact on the government.

Against this background, it may sound strange to relate the struggle of NGOs in building civil society by striving for power in the political arena, which is in essence not their main target or agenda. That is, however, the case with Indonesia. Because of the totalitarian hegemony of the Old Order (1945–65) and the New Order (1966–98), these two Islamic NGOs which were well organized nationally, were simultaneously utilized by their leaders as an effective medium for direct access to the political arena.

Now, new problems come to the fore. First, how will the Muhammadiyah portray its social and cultural roles after some of its leaders have become active in the forefront of the political arena? When activists of NGOs such as Abdurrahman Wahid and Amien Rais come to power and gain high and respectable positions in the government, whether in the executive, judicial, or legislative positions,[16] will they still have the same concern, spirit, and ethos as they had before, when they only acted as members of NGOs? The same question could be addressed to the leaders of these NGOs at the various levels, from the national headquarters, provinces, and municipalities to villages. The population will watch carefully whether they behave differently or act just like their predecessors in the previous regime whom they overthrew. It is the first time for Muslim activists from NGOs to play a key role in the democratic government in the new era of Indonesia. Indonesians and the world will look carefully for consistency as those newly-elected politicians strive to empower the citizens and to promote the basic values of civil society.

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The second problem is who will continuously maintain and nurture the Muhammadiyah organization, with its enormous activities in all provinces of Indonesia, after its decision to release its activists to party politics? Will these activists and leaders be trapped and thoroughly absorbed into the political sphere? Will they put aside the social and cultural activities of the Muhammadiyah which have so far been their main concern? These questions should be raised since it is the first time in its long history for the cadres of the Muhammadiyah to be directly involved in political affairs.

The phenomenon of Amien Rais' emergence in the Reformation movement in particular, and that of the Muhammadiyah's involvement in post-Soeharto party politics in general, present a genuine message from Southeast Asian Muslims. They exemplify clearly the intertwining of cultural and structural approaches employed in the struggle for an understanding and implementation of the idea of civil society in Indonesia. The acronym KKN (meaning "corruption, collusion, and nepotism") is widely used in Indonesia today, after the decline of Soeharto's regime. This acronym exhibits the ills of the country that need to be remedied immediately. Using Ernest Gellner's term, the practice of *clientalism* is widely spread in all of the Muslim world including Indonesia.[17] One of the most difficult items of the agenda of the Reformation Order today is to clean up all bureaucratic practices at all levels to eliminate the infection of *clientalism*. Clean governance, social control, transparency, accountability, and checks and balances are among the civic virtues that are being promoted in "New Indonesia" today.

It is the writer's claim that the Muhammadiyah's original target of purification in the field of Islamic doctrine and religious practices, which basically concerns only matters related to personal life and the individual morality of Muslims, has been continuously expanding its scope into the area of public morality. In the latter, the idea of civil society has become its essential and fundamental tenet. The Muhammadiyah as an NGO has been relatively successful in promoting not only the values but also the agenda of civil society. It has also been successful in promoting its cadres as leading figures in the Reformation politics. It is my assumption that the Muhammadiyah as an NGO and a voluntary association will make continuous and consistent efforts for embedding the values of civil society and civic virtues in the country regardless of the position of its cadres *vis-à-vis* the government in power.

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Notes

[1] Robert W. Hefner, "A Muslim Civil Society? Indonesian Reflection on the Conditions of its Possibility", in *Democratic Civility: The History and Cross-cultural Possibility of a Modern Political Ideal,* edited by Robert W. Hefner (New Brunswick: Transaction Publisher, 1998), p. 287.

[2] Ibid., p. 285.

[3] John A. Hall, ed., *Civil Society: Theory, History, Comparison* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995).

[4] Researchers, both foreign as well as Indonesian, who wrote their dissertations on the topic of the Muhammadiyah movement in Indonesia include the following: Mitsuo Nakamura, "The Crescent Arises over the Banyan Tree: A Study of the Muhammadiyah in a Central Javanese Town" (Ph.D. dissertation, Cornell University Press, 1976); James L. Peacock, *Purifying the Faith: The Muhammadiyah Movement in Indonesian Islam* (Menlo Park, California: The Benjamin/Cummings Publishing Company, 1978); Alfian, *Muhammadiyah: The Political Behaviour of a Muslim Modernist Organization under Dutch Colonialism* (Yogyakarta: Gadjah Mada University Press, 1989); andAchmad Jainuri, "The Formation of the Muhammadiyah's Ideology 1912–1942" (Ph.D. dissertation, Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Montreal, Canada, 1997). This dissertation was published by IAIN Sunan Ampel Press, Surabaya, 1999.

[5] According to statistics and documents issued by its headquarters in Yogyakarta in 1997, the Muhammadiyah currently has 4,611 branches spread out in 61,758 villages and 659 districts. Among the social and educational activities run by this NGO are 974 elementary schools, 1,078 secondary high schools, 541 senior high schools, 100 vocational training schools, 24 universities, 36 academies, 5 institutes, 241 centres for social activities, and 308 health-care centres. See Bagian Humas, Pendataan, Dokumentasi dan Perpustakaan Kantor Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta, *Kumpulan Data Alamat Organisasi Muhammadiyah Anggota Pimpinan Pusat, Majelis, Lembaga, Badan dan Ortom Pimpinan Wilayah, Cabang dan Ranting, Amal Usaha, Pendidikan, Sosial, Kesehatan dan Ekonomi seluruh Indonesia* , 20 June 1997.

[6] See *Surat Keputusan Pimpinan Pusat Muhammadiyah No. 42/SK-PP/I-A/i.a/1998 tentang Tanfidz Keputusan Tanwir Muhammadiyah Tahun 1998, 21 Juli 1998.*

[7] Achmad Jainuri, op. cit., p. 136.

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[8] For further explanation concerning Muhammadiyah's interpretation of Islamic doctrine for social reform, see ibid. pp. 109–69.

[9] Adam S. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York: The Free Press, 1992), p. 6.

[10] According to the Muhammadiyah, the slogan "Back to the Qur'an and *Hadith*" stands for revelation, while *tajdid* and *ijtihad* stand for reason. One of the vital functions of reason is to criticize all institutionalized human interpretations and practices of the revelation which are not workable and applicable anymore due to changes in human history and civilization.

[11] For further information, see Achmad Jainuri, op. cit., pp. 92, 103, 105, and 112.

[12] A. Mukti Ali, *Alam Pikiran Modern di Indonesia* and *Modern Thought in Indonesia* (Jogjakarta: Jajasan NIDA, 1971), p. 5; cf. Deliar Noer, *The Modernist Muslim Movement in Indonesia 1900–1942* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[13] Besides Amien Rais, Abdurrahman Wahid (popularly known as Gus Dur) from the Nahdlatul Ulama also represents the spirit and the ethos of the Indonesian Muslim in promoting and implementing the idea of civil society in Southeast Asia. Both Amien Rais and Gus Dur are living representatives of Islamic NGOs. There are many other organizations, of course, but they do not have the structure and the machinery of organization that can touch the grassroots people, like the Muhammadiyah and the Nahdlatul Ulama. There is a good relationship among Muslim activists in Indonesia. The solidity of these Muslim organizations in their political alliance right now is exemplified in what they call the "middle axis" (*poros tengah*) or "reformation fraction" (*fraksi reformasi*) in the House of People's Representatives.

[14] During these last two or three years, there have been more than ten books portraying Amien Rais' significant role in empowering civil society from the political dimension in Indonesia. Among them is M. Amien Rais, *Membangun Politik Adiluhung: Membumikan Tauhid Sosial Menegakkan Amar Ma'ruf Nahi Munka*(Bandung: Zaman Wacana Mulia, 1998); Ir. Najib, M.Sc.,*Suara Amien Rais Suara Rakyat*(Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1998); M. Amien Rais, *Refleksi Amien Rais dari Persoalan Semut Sampai Gajah* (Jakarta: Gema Insani Press, 1997); Mustofa W. Hasyim dan Taufiq Alimi,*Suksesi dan Keajaiban Kekuasaan* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1997); Soeparno S. Adhy, *Melangkah Karena Dipaksa Sejarah* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 1998); Mustafa W. Hasyim *Amien Rais Siap Gantikan Habibi* (Yogyakarta: Titian Ilahi

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Press: 1999); Okkie F. Mustaqie, *Membangun Kekuatan di Atas Keberagaman* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Suara Muhammadiyah, 1998); Dokumentasi Press, *Kasus Amien Rais ada Udang di Balik Busang* (Mizan, 1997); Dedy Djamaluddin Malik dan Idi Subandy Ibrahim, *Zaman Baru Islam Indonesia Pemikiran dan Aksi Politik Abdurrahman Wahid, M. Amien Rais, Nurcholish Madjid, dan Jalaluddin Rakhmat* (Bandung: Aman Wacana Mulia, 1998); Mustofa W. Hasyim, Mathori Al Wustho, dan Lutfi Effendi, *Demi Pendidikan Politik, Saya Siap Jadi Calon Presiden* (Yogyakarta: Titian Ilahi Press, 1997); M. Amien Rais, *Demi Kepentingan Bangsa* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar); Arief Affandi, *Islam Demokrasi Atas Bawah Polemik Strategi Perjuangan Model Gus Dur dan Amien Rais* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar); Amien Rais, *Mengatasi Kritis dari Serambi Masjid* (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar); Umarudin Masdar, *Membaca Pikiran Gus Dur dan Amien Rais tentang Demokrasi* (Yogyakarta: Pelajar); Ahmad Bahar Taufiq Alimi, *Amien Rais Berjuang Menuntut Perubahan* (Yogyakarta: Cendekia, 1998).

[15] Dewan Pimpinah Wilayah Partai Amanat Nasional Daerah Istimewa Yogyakarta, Periode 1998–2000, *AD/ART PAN*, pp. 7–8.

[16] M. Amien Rais was sworn in as chief of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) on 4 October 1999, while K. H. Abdurrahman Wahid became the fourth President of the Republic of Indonesia 1999–2004 on 20 October 1999.

[17] Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty, Civil Society and Its Rivals* (London: Penguin Group, 1994).

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PART II

THE MALAYSIAN EXPERIENCE
Islamization, the Muslim Community, and Inter-Ethnic Relations

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4

Islam, Civil Society, and Ethnic Relations in Malaysia

Mohamad Abu Bakar

INTRODUCTION

Islam as a religion, as a way of life, and as a "mercy to mankind" (*rahmatan lil 'alamin*) constitutes a comprehensive guide to the adherents of the faith in their relationship both with God (*hablun min Allah*) and within society (*hablun min nas*). Qur'anic injunctions and Prophetic instructions (*al-Hadith*) abound with exhortations for Muslims to interact positively with fellow human beings and to undertake social work to bring about a just order which will benefit all. Throughout Islamic history, civil society organizations have principally come to the aid of the less fortunate, to relieve their suffering, and to give charity to the needy. Working independently of the state, these institutions thrived not only because they were religiously inspired, but also because the larger society was able to serve as a strong support system for their growth.

The advent of Islam in Malaysia was also associated with the activities of such voluntary organizations which operated with a high-level of autonomy in spite of the pervasive influence of the Malay sultanate or *kerajaan*. At various times, there had existed many societies which operated along these lines. With the moral and material backing of the surrounding Muslim communities in the form of *waqf* (public endowment) funds, etc., they were able to function side by side with the various state departments and agencies. *Waqf* financial backing in particular had enabled Islamic educational institutions, notably the *pondok* (boarding schools) to be run, and the *ulama* (religious scholars) to perform their duties as preachers, independently of the government. In modern times, such non-government non-profit organizations have also flourished. In the context of Malaysia's multi-ethnic society, the existence of such *dakwah* (proselytization) movements as Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM, or the Malaysian

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Muslim Youth Organization), and certain political parties like Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS, or the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party), with their commitment to the "Islamization of society", was part of the process of democratic institution-building which has had a bearing on the development of Malaysia. Their very presence and performance in the period between 1975 and 1990 especially gave a new dimension to ethnic relations in the country as a whole.

Civil formations which preceded ABIM and PAS, by and large, did not give due attention to the non-Muslims, although Islam was not meant just for the Muslim members of society. The proselytization efforts directed at the Chinese and Indians, two of the major constituent elements of the Malaysian non-Muslim communities, were undertaken in the main by either individual preachers (*da'i*) or by government religious bodies, the Department of Islamic Affairs (Jabatan Hal Ehwal Islam) and the like. Initially, ABIM too was geared towards inculcating Islamic values within the Muslim Malay society, which it considered to have been corrupted by the secularizing tendencies of the West. Only towards the end of the eighties did it begin to see its role in a new light *vis-à-vis* the non-Malay non-Muslims, in the context of nation-building. Malaysia's democratic climate apart, the organization also was energized by the lack of effort on the part of the government to solve ethnic problems. ABIM thus felt it necessary to fill the void following the ruling authority's failure to overcome the problem of racial disharmony. The participation of PAS followed soon after. Although it entered the Malaysian political scene much earlier, the issue did not initially engage the energies of the party, partly out of its respect for the religious feelings of the non-Muslims, but more importantly because it too was trapped in a world of communal consciousness which perpetuated indifference if not intolerance. Its socialization to "Islam as a way of life" which happened in the mid-seventies caused it to overcome its earlier exclusivism and allowed it to focus on multi-ethnic harmony as well. The party's action, which resulted in further confrontational relations with the ruling National Front, was also influenced by its own vision of a more civilized Malaysia under the rule of Islam.

RETROSPECT: ISLAM AND ETHNIC RELATIONS

In spite of their long-standing contact and relationship, spanning a period of more than a hundred years, the Malays and the non-Malays have not interacted much in areas which touch on the Islamic religion. Even though there has been conversion to Islam among the Chinese and Indians from time to time, their number was, however, small and negligible. Compounded

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with that is the popular view among the Chinese in particular, that the converts, in so doing, have simultaneously forfeited their religion and abandoned their race to be in the embrace of another race — the Malays. The term "*masuk Melayu*", a phrase used by the Malays to describe the change of faith, in fact, partly conjures up the image associated with the Chinese feeling. The unfavourable treatment sometimes meted out by members of the Chinese community towards those who have deserted their "race" and religion makes the situation worse. Conversion to Islam, in other words, has not generated a harmonious relationship between members of the two respective communities. However, in situations where racial sentiments are not reinforced by religious division, as with the case of relations between Malays and Indian Muslims, there exist better and greater inter-communal ties.

The history of ethnic relations in Malaysia, as a whole, has not been conducive to the growth of Islam as a "mercy to mankind". British colonialism, which began in earnest in the 1870s, and which was largely responsible for bringing in Chinese and Indian immigrants, [1] had long sown the seeds of ethnic conflict through its divide-and-rule policy. The colonial practices, undergirded by a racial ideology of innate or inherent differences, had caused the preservation and the institutionalization of perceived differences among the races. [2] The resultant concentration of different racial groups in "residential communities" (Charles Hirschman) which developed in the wake of colonial administration had created divisive feelings among the people. On the one hand, it sharpened old ethnic identities, while on the other, it accentuated racial prejudice when Malays and non-Malays took to different jobs and adopted different styles of living. Their mutual suspicion was further fueled by their conflicting approaches to politics and socio-economic development during the campaign for national independence.

The Malay preoccupation with the nationalist struggle and their concern over the Chinese and Indian socio-economic progress in the first half of the twentieth century further nurtured ethnic awareness among Malaysians of different racial origins, and minimized inter-ethnic group interactions. While the British on their part had created a state of polarization, the nationalist tendency and anxiety among the Malays, though not provoking rigorous opposition from among the non-Malays, had at least permitted the maintenance of ethnic identity. Islam, which was perceived by the Malays as a religion of their own, played a major role in spawning the nationalist consciousness and augmenting the fear of the Chinese and the Indians.[3] To the extent that "religion in itself is culture-forming" (Nathan Glazer), such projection of nationalism and racial struggle in

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Islamic terms would necessarily increase ethnic awareness among all those affected. In fact, resultantly, the non-Malays either looked increasingly inward and developed group institutions, or cultivated stronger ancestral attachments with their homelands.

Islam continued to remain a basis of Malay unity, a form of ethnic identification, and an important ethnic boundary-maker after World War II. With the influx of Chinese and Indians already a source of worry, and their socio-economic encroachment constituting a major intellectual and political challenge, the Malays became easily incensed whenever the overtures of the non-Malays were construed as attempts to take over the country. This happened, for example, in the wake of the collapse of Japanese rule after the war, when Malays resorted to arms in order to defend themselves under the Sabilullah Movement. Their action which was regarded in harmony with Islam was joined by secular-oriented political organizations, which all in all reinforced the chauvinistic stand of those concerned.

Politicians of various ideological shades and personal inclinations were also to be blamed for this state of affairs, so much so that Malaysia came to be described as "a plural society par excellence".[4] In the manner Malay nationalists had endowed Malay society and Malay nationalism with a certain religious sanctity, Malay politicians had also forged links with members of the Malay community on the basis of race and religion. The presumed common identity between Islam and Malayness had, among others, led to the formation of the United Malays National Organization (UMNO) in 1946. UMNO spearheaded the struggle against the British, championed the cause of the Malays *vis-à-vis* the Chinese and the Indians, and constituted the backbone of the ruling coalition party which has ruled Malaysia until today. In the words of one scholar, UMNO had become "a Malay exclusive party".[5]

Such fusion of nationalist and ethnic outlook with religious spirit naturally alienated the Chinese and Indian communities. In the meantime, there also emerged among them political parties, the prominent ones being the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA) and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC), which, respectively, catered to the needs of the Chinese and the Indians. To the extent that UMNO rose against a backdrop of a general deterioration of the Malays, these parties were intended to address the grievances of their supporters and followers who had to endure living in an alien country. In the process, the Chinese and the Indians not only developed bonds of solidarity among themselves, but also began to look back to their older cultures. The mobilization of support along ethnic line together with the segregation of the races which occurred following the establishment of

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British rule, therefore, had both restricted opportunities for inter-ethnic interaction and increased the preservationist tendency of the people.

The achievement of political liberation or *Merdeka* in 1957 failed to put a halt to racial polarization. It did not result in the diminution of the role of UMNO, MCA, and MIC as ethnically-based parties. In fact, the coalition of these three parties in the form of the Alliance Party (the National Front's predecessor) earlier, and their participation in the electoral process before and after independence manifested ethnic consciousness and ethnic rivalry unknown before. On their part, the Muslim Malays continued to remain immersed in their own culture, with Islam as its primary identity. They found comfort in asserting their separateness, and during times of crisis, such as the May riot in 1969, they even rallied around their religion to confront the Chinese. Various public policies adopted by the government in relation to the Malays and Islam concurrently revived Malay rights and Islamic interests. These included the building of mosques and *surau* (small prayer places), and the support given to religious schools. The ethnic trend was further aided by the constitutional definition of a Malay as someone who habitually speaks Bahasa Melayu (the Malay language), follows Malay *adat* (custom), and professes Islam. In the final analysis, religion assumed a place of great importance in the Malay ethnic make-up.

ABIM, PAS, AND THE CIVILIZATIONAL CHALLENGE

For the purpose of this paper, a short introduction of ABIM and PAS is in order. ABIM or Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (Malaysian Muslim Youth Organization) was formed in 1971 by a group of Muslim activists comprising mostly former student leaders of the University of Malaya and institutions of higher learning abroad, bent upon moulding the Malay society in an Islamic image, and creating an Islamic order for Malaysia. [6] While absorbed principally in training its members and laying the foundation for the ideologization of Islam, it invariably ran at cross-purposes with the power-that-be when it started to offer its own solution to national ills. Its formula for nation-building included the adoption of an Islamic approach to solving ethnic problems. PAS or Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party) which was established three decades earlier was also committed to creating an Islamic polity and resurrecting the Islamic past, but in re-enacting the Medina of the Prophet it had chosen a different path.[7] It registered itself as a political party and was immersed in a parliamentary struggle to achieve its goal of an Islamic order. By addressing itself to the plight of the non-Muslims in the eighties and early nineties, it

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hoped to win over the non-Muslim electorates to its side, and augment its power base with a view to winning the national elections. Its new emphasis on ethnic relations coincided with the popularization of "Islam as a way of life" during the period.

These Islamists set to their task with great determination and enthusiasm, spreading the message of Islam as a panacea for the ethnically-mixed population of Malaysia long troubled by the problems of racial disharmony. Basically, they tried to drive home the point that Islam is not just for the Malays, but also for others as well, irrespective of their racial or cultural origins. Without mentioning the Muslim Malays' "past mistake" of not selling Islam to the Chinese and the Indians, these adherents of the faith dwelt at length on the universal scope of their religion. While references to Islam's role in fostering inter-ethnic tolerance and forging social unity abound in history books, such infatuation with Islam was quite unprecedented.

This Islamic project was obviously an ambitious one in view of the enormity of the problems associated with nation-building in Malaysia in particular, and in creating an Islamic civilization in modern time in general. In a situation where Muslim Malays had not performed satisfactorily in the fields of economy and education in the past, there was not much that the non-Muslim Chinese and Indians could look up for emulation. In casting themselves as saviours, the Malays therefore had to contend with a set of people who not only were distinct in essentials, such as religion and eating habits, but also considered themselves superior to the *bumiputera* (the sons of the soil) or the indigenous people. For sure, all along, the Chinese and the Indians who had inherited their own civilizations had shown pride in their cultural and religious traditions. On top of that, the international news media which generally had been portraying Islam in a bad light had also created a negative image for the religion, and that made it all the more difficult for the non-Muslim Chinese and Indians to be influenced in the direction of the "New Islam". Poverty which was rampant in many Muslim societies, the cruelty of some Muslim leaders, and the backwardness afflicting a good number of Muslim-dominated countries, to name but a few, were examples which easily came to their minds whenever mention of Islam or Islamic rule was made. Thus, together with the fear of further Malay domination and the total application of the Shariah or Islamic laws, these concerns were generating conflict which affected interactions across ethnic boundaries.

To make matters worse, the knowledge of the non-Malays of Islam as the religion of the Malays was minimal, to say the least, and this by itself

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was a contributing factor which inhibited them from blending into the mainstream Malaysian society. They had been viewing Islam from a peripheral position. More often than not, they came into contact with aspects of Malay life, religious and non-religious in nature, but not with Islam as such. Their interactions allowed them to understand parts of *solat* (prayer), *puasa* (fasting) and the *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), and the Malay dietary habits and restrictions, especially the Malays' abhorrence of pork. Of course, the Muslim Malays were partly accountable for keeping the non-Malays in perpetual ignorance of their religion. For example, some of them were in the habit of making threatening remarks to the effect that the Chinese or the Indians had to be circumcised (*bersunat*) first before they could convert to Islam, or had to forgo pork upon becoming Muslims. All in all, these had reinforced ethnic stereotypes. Thus, while the Chinese and the Indians could interact freely with the Malays when it came to economic matters, or even political affairs, they normally would shy away from discussing the religious dimension of Malay life. Leaders of the various races also made a point to stress that Islam and anything that had to do with it were sensitive issues which should be best left to the Malays only. The cumulative effect of this was that, in spite of Islam having been associated with the Malaysian multi-ethnic scene for at least one hundred years, it had always been treated as a Malay religion. No matter what certain Islamic books had been saying about the universalistic character of Islam, the Malays generally upheld the view that it was co-terminous with Malayness. This synonymity had registered well in the minds of all, notably the Chinese and the Indians.

In this regard, both ABIM and PAS had to grapple with their own past image as Malay-based and Malay-oriented protective associations. For nearly a decade since its inception, ABIM, in spite of its cherished Islamic ideals, had been galvanizing Malay youths in their action to promote Islam, and had not shown adequate special concern for the predicament of other races. Similarly, the long-standing preoccupation of PAS with Malay rights and privileges, and its struggle to make Malays retain their ethnic identity, had alienated the non-Malay non-Muslims all along.[8] Therefore, any move on the part of ABIM or PAS to forge a common outlook towards Islam among the various races, what more to make them conform to Islamic rulings, would necessarily run into difficulties. The civilizational challenge was a real one. Moreover, to the non-Malay non-Muslims, it was inconceivable that Islamic pressure groups would stand up for their cause and articulate their anxieties in an ethnically-divided country like Malaysia.

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ISLAMIC CIVIL FORMATIONS AND THE IDEOLOGIZATION OF ISLAM

A major dimension of contemporary Islamic resurgence in Malaysia, as elsewhere, was its emphasis on "Islam as a way of life". Although the Muslim Malays had throughout the ages lived out their religion in all aspects of their life, they hardly made the point to stress it as "a way of life" or *ad din*. This was a significant departure because for the first time attempts had been made in a major way to understand and comprehend Islam as a total system. And in attempting to emphasize the validity of Islam in the modern world, the Islamists, willy-nilly, had articulated their concerns along ideological lines. The projection of Islam as a way of life in itself was a strong statement of philosophy. Islam in this connection had assumed the role of a contending set of ideas which, if translated into action, would result in Islam becoming more than a religious and cultural system. As part of a broader attempt at Islamizing the Malaysian society, these Islamists considered Islam an appropriate ideology that could bring about the much needed unity. Islam, therefore, had offered itself a civilizational role. In the seventies and eighties, with ABIM and PAS broadening their roles, the Islamic challenge had become all the more formidable. Their presence also was seen as subverting the existing secular order.

In romanticizing pristine Islam, the multi-racial and multi-religious character of the Malaysian society did not escape the attention of ABIM and PAS. *Dakwah* which entails the propagation of the faith to the whole of mankind was indeed premised on the Qur'anic verse which exhorts Muslims to "do good and avoid evil" (*amal makruf nahi munkar*). Their struggle was also predicated on the belief that they were duty-bound to look "outward" as well in their missionary activities. The question apparently had never engaged Muslim leaders before. To be Islamic then was to practise tolerance towards the other communities. To exceed that limit was to invite trouble, for one as such would be treading on a dangerous path, as Malaysia's first Prime Minister, Tunku Abdul Rahman, found it apt to warn: "Our country has many races and unless we are prepared to drown every non-Malay, we can never think of an Islamic administration."[9] The universalist vision of life of contemporary Islamists was practically unknown before.

The fact that these *dakwah* activists were willing to go so far to exhibit the Islamic solution to communalism demonstrates three things at least: first, a new realization had dawned upon them that for Islam to prosper as

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a universal religion it should not remain the preserve of the Malays. The Islamists were also under the obligation to enter the race relations dimension as well. Second, in view of past failures to achieve social harmony and national integration, the Islamic formula, which had never been attempted before, should also be given a try in solving issues arising from multi-racialism. Third, a new feeling of confidence among the Malays, animated by their new educational and economic achievements, had emboldened the Islamists to view Islam in these terms. Hence, Islam as a means to perpetuate Malay ethnic consciousness and to fortify their position was now overtaken by Islam as a way to galvanize the various races and create internal integration through some form of harmonious coexistence.

The stage was set when Islamic activists from ABIM beginning 1976 debated the Islamic solution in rhetorical flourish about Islam as a universal religion. Presenting the organization's case at an Asia-Pacific *dakwah* seminar that year, its president, Anwar Ibrahim, spoke in detail about Islam's potential as a formula for national unity. He urged the Malaysian Government to consider applying Islam in its entirety, so that it would be in a position to take care of the country's problems, including those which arose from ethnic differences. *Risalah*, the society's news magazine, picked up the issue where Anwar left, by amplifying the role of Islam as the solution to the nation's racial problems. It was contended that as a belief-system it is not only in accord with human requirements, but would also allow a high degree of pluralism.[10] The Qur'anic verse which in categorical terms spelt out division among mankind into nations and tribes, and which called upon its members to recognize one another [11] was not lost on ABIM's *da'i*. It was also argued that the implementation of the Shariah and the actualization of the Islamic way of life would provide the alternative path for the establishment of a peaceful and stable Malaysia. Multi-racialism and multi-culturalism, it was stressed, were not foreign to Islamic history.[12] More importantly was ABIM's enunciation of its programme during the organization's *Muktamar Senawi* (annual conference) in 1979. It proposed the adoption of an Islamic solution to the nation's racial problems, apart from reiterating both the universal nature of Islam and the failure of past approaches in solving racial issues. A new ethnic adjustment was seen as a must, and towards that end ABIM called upon all sides to put the Islamic teachings into practice, thereby minimizing racial differences in the country. It was a vision which derived from an Islamic world-view, devoid of the earlier considerations which saw the destinies of Islam and the Malays as interlocked.

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Indeed, ABIM had developed a new context for understanding and overcoming Malaysia's racial problems. By emphasizing the Islamic conception of racial equality, the organization was able to highlight an important facet of Islamic civilization which had gone virtually unnoticed before. *Panji Masyarakat*, an ABIM-sponsored periodical, in its October 1979 issue, for example, took a diametrically opposite view from one often popularized by Malay nationalists when it noted that: "We don't accept the position of the Chinese chauvinists or that of the Malay extremists. We are moderate. To us the important thing is that national policies must be based on ethical considerations, principles of Islamic social justice."[13] Several ABIM leaders in their struggle for a civilized Malaysia also developed the theme "Islam as a Solution to the Problems of a Multi-Racial Society" by holding talks and discussions with members of the organization nationwide, and by holding dialogue sessions with non-Muslims in several areas. Either out of curiosity or due to newly-cultivated fear, several non-Muslim organizations, including a Hindu movement and a Christian association, provided the forum for ABIM activists to explain their stand and develop their views on race relations from an Islamic perspective.[14]

Essentially, their arguments about Islam as a way of life and a universal religion revolved around the notion that Islam was not against non-Muslims as such. Under Islamic regulations, Muslims and non-Muslims would have the opportunity to live side by side in a spirit of tolerance and in an atmosphere of friendship. Since "there is no compulsion in religion" as the Qur'an puts it, the non-Muslims would be free to practise their faiths. Their places of worship would be protected. Likewise, they too would not be prohibited from holding public office or engaging in economic activities, or from owning property. Armed with the Islamic idea about the origin of man, these Islamists contended that under the Shariah all men will be treated as equals, and society and nation as such would undergo a civilizational transformation through the incorporation of elements from other cultures.

The variety of Islamic experiences with multi-ethnic societies in the past were also cited to demonstrate the practicability of the religion. To the Islamists concerned, the just treatment meted out to non-Muslims in history stands out in bold relief, and is a constant reminder about the grandeur of Islamic civilization. This was well exemplified by the lives of several well-known Muslims who championed the cause of their non-Muslim members of society. As a "religion of peace", Islam ensured safety and security to all, in the manner the Najran Christians during

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Prophet Mohammed's administration, the Jews under the Caliphate of Omar, and the Hindus under the Mughal domination, fared. Based on these selected Islamic historical experiences, the ABIM Islamists felt that they could stand on a high moral ground to preach the virtues of their faith in matters pertaining to race relations. In their view, Buddhists, Hindus, and Christians in Malaysia therefore would also have the same freedom to worship their gods, and to practise their personal laws.

Several prominent leaders of PAS also joined the chorus proclaiming the relevancy of Islam in modern multi-ethnic Malaysia, and started to broach the idea of "Islam as a solution to communalism". Though not in league with ABIM, these politicians were, of course, greatly enhanced by the pro-Islamic sentiments of the Malays who had come under the spell of *dakwah*, and emboldened by the rapid socialization towards Islamic orthodoxy in the country. The moment appeared propitious for PAS to shed off its old image as a Malay-cum-Islamic party and to emerge as a full-blown Islamic organization. The party's earlier "mono-ethnic orientation"[15] had proven to be a burden to its mobilization efforts to get the non-Muslim non-Malays to side with its struggle.

Basically, Muslim Malays were reminded that they should not be preoccupied with personal piety or the well-being of their racial group only in order to be good followers of the faith; they must also actualize other ideals of the religion as well, including addressing themselves to the larger problems of social engineering and the shaping of human destiny. *Dakwah* of course had caused members of the Malay community to be more disposed towards an Islamic outlook in line with the Qur'anic teachings. The appropriation of Islamic values consequent upon the spread of the "New Islam" had not only turned many Malays who were originally contemptuous of religious life to religion, but had also caused a good number of them to spread Islam beyond the Malay community. Expanding the universal values of Islam to cover others suddenly became part of PAS' political strategy.

PAS did not differ much from ABIM in terms of its presentation of Islam as a solution to racial problems. Islam as a universal religion, and the Islamic idea of justice were the two major selling points in the party's campaign. Like ABIM, it also spoke about Islam's cosmopolitan tendencies and the multi-racial character of Islamic life under *Pax Islamica*. PAS President, Mohamad Asri, catalogued the successes Islam achieved during its rule in Egypt and Spain, where the status of Coptic Christians and European Jews was respectively protected. [16] As a party interested in winning the support of the majority of Malaysians, PAS must achieve a

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realignment of political forces through its Islamic approach to nation-building. It was therefore in order that race relations took a new urgency in its political agenda, for without the backing of non-Muslims, PAS could not hope to wrestle power from the ruling National Front, of which UMNO, MCA, and MIC are its constituent parts. Interestingly, with the exception of Asri, the party's chief, the rest of the PAS leaders who were in the forefront of this non-racialist struggle were all ex-ABIM activists.

At a later stage, PAS practically went on the ground to preach the virtues of Islamic government to the non-Malays. Under its *ulama* leadership, which followed upon the ouster of Asri, the party was no longer constrained by the nationalist considerations of old, which often pitched it against the non-Muslim non-Malays. Post-Asri PAS venture was not only more assertive in championing the cause of Islam, but was also concerned about building a new relationship with the non-Islamic segments of the Malaysian population. It particularly started in a big way to draw links with non-Muslim Chinese and Indians by attending their functions and explaining the Islamic political systems. In short, in repositioning itself, PAS had gone beyond its traditional constituency, the Malays.

The movement to bring about the new Islamic consciousness among the people was also joined by several members of the National Front. Although their approach was not as sophisticated as that shown by the ABIM activists, their participation was important, as it helped create saliency necessary for the Islamic message to have an impact on the national process. From the viewpoint of the civil society development, there had developed a rapport between the government and the non-government organizations, although politically they were competing for the same democratic space.

UMNO politicians who attempted to present Islam in the new light were given wide publicity, and their views, though not cited as representative of the government approach to nation-building, were seen by many as an indication of the authority's growing inclination towards Islam. To the Islamists from among ABIM in particular, their involvement signalled a recognition of sort from above of their undertaking. The citizens' movement as embodied by the organization was increasingly accepted by the government in nation-building. UMNO politicians who had taken position on the issue of race relations from the Islamic point of view included the Deputy Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad, and the Minister for Finance, Tengku Razaleigh Hamzah. Mahathir in fact went a step further when he tried to elaborate on the nature of Islamic rule. To him, a proper presentation

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of Islamic life could even win the non-Muslims to Islam. [17] Meanwhile, Tengku Razaleigh opined that the position of the non-Muslims would not be jeopardized as a result of the establishment of Islamic economic institutions.[18] Anwar Ibrahim who, by the early 1980s, had joined UMNO also pursued the matter further when he called for a fuller implementation of the Shariah.

Less dramatic, but probably more meaningful in terms of cultivating pro-Islamic sentiments among the Chinese and the Indians, was the government Islamization programme. The policy apparently was adopted to extract political mileage, especially in view of the resurgence of PAS, but other factors had also accounted for the growing Islamization within the government. The incorporation of Islamic values, as the policy which was introduced in 1982 came to be known, became the centrepiece of the ruling party's policy towards Islam, under the Mahathir administration. It entailed, among others, the establishment of an Islamic bank and an Islamic university, the teaching of Islamic civilization courses in institutions of higher learning, and the inculcation of Islamic ethics in the administrative service. Such measures for sure were affecting race relations, but because the methods involved were less assertive in nature, the Islamization process concerned had not created much of a stir within the non-Muslim communities. One aspect of this Islamization drive, which was to have a significant impact on race relations, was the central and state governments' attempts to bring their administrations in line with religious requirements. In 1982, the Federal Government introduced the Penal Code and Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill meant to safeguard Islam. The law provides for actions to be taken against those who carry out activities prejudicial to Islam or attempt to disrupt Muslim unity. Another example was the passage of the Islamic Administration Enactment Bill in 1989 which, *inter alia,* allows non-Muslim minors to embrace Islam on reaching the age of puberty (*baligh*) according to the Shariah.

ENLARGING THE CIVIL SOCIETY AND ENSURING A STABLE MALAYSIA — THE NON-MUSLIM RESPONSE TO ISLAMIZATION

To the Islamists, the ideologization of Islam was a promising exercise in terms of bridging ethnic differences and ultimately restructuring Malaysian society. In fact, initially the response from among the non-Malay non-Muslims was far from hostile, although some greeted the attempts by ABIM activists with shock. Talks and forums organized by ABIM to explain the Islamic solution to communalism, though not highly popular,

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were well attended. The audience included leaders and supporters of the Chinese-dominated Democratic Action Party (DAP). Likewise, the efforts by PAS to reconstitute Malaysia's race relations along Islamic lines were not fully rejected by the non-Muslim communities. Although unprepared for such eventuality, they were willing to subject themselves to the Islamists' espousal of a religious view of Malaysia. The non-Muslims involved generally allowed the *dakwah* movement to come to pass rather than reacting strongly against the religious rhetoric. In several predominantly Chinese areas where PAS made its presence felt, via its *ceramah* (talks), there was evidence of a high level of participation among the audience. Its meetings, held to enlighten members of the community concerned, were even patronized by their leaders. Nevertheless, after some time, the non-Muslim Chinese and Indians who were originally responsive to the Islamists' call and who lent their ears to their exhortation, began to evince greater racial consciousness. Apparently, the logic used by the *dakwah* activists to explain the wisdom of embracing the Islamic cause did not appeal to them. Basically, the fear of Islam and the rule of the Shariah militated against the Islamic cultural onslaught conducted by PAS. In reaction, many of them entered the fray by activating their own organizations, mobilizing their members, or forming their own societies in order to champion the cause of their co-religionists in the face of the Islamists' challenge. For some, it was time to regroup in order to propagate their various religious and cultural ideals. [19]

In the course of the confrontation, they resorted to forming bonds of solidarity to maintain their religious identity or revise their cultural heritage, or seeking a new spiritual embrace in their respective beliefs. Many Christian groups of various denominations, Buddhists organizations, and Hindu associations which had remained dormant before, were revived and sprang into action. Adherents of these non-Islamic faiths congregated in large numbers especially in cities and towns, where they were joined by newborn Christians, newborn Buddhists, and newborn Hindus, respectively. "Christians, Hindus, and Buddhists have invested much energy and money into expanding their organizations partly to meet perceived threats stemming from growing Islamic activism."[20] In orchestrating their campaign against the government's drive at greater Islamization, several of them had formed a united front — the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism and Sikhism — in 1984 and had petitioned the authority for its "unMalaysian" tendency. The Council particularly regretted the move to Islamize Malaysian laws stressing that "non-Muslims in the country were happy with the existing laws which governed them because they have been time-tested and proven to be good". [21]

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With race as one of the country's fault lines, it was easy for the religious preoccupation of one ethnic group to cause alarm among members of the other communities. Their anxieties and suspicions also played into the hands of their political leaders who instantaneously decried the Islamization programme with increasing vehemence. *Dakwah* actions were portrayed as activities which undermined their cherished democratic secular ideals or presented as something which masked the ethnic interests of the Malays. In the main, their argument was that the various Islamic measures taken by the government indicated that the political leadership had veered off the promised path set by the nation's founding fathers. They were arrayed against the authority. Attempts at the resurrection of the Shariah by ABIM and PAS had also added fuel to the burning issue of Islamization. The DAP challenged the Penal Code and Criminal Procedure (Amendment) Bill which it regarded as an encroachment on the freedom of religion. Together with MCA it also stood opposed to the Islamic Administration Enactment Bill 1989. For the DAP leader, Lim Kit Siang, "the Islamization measures in various states … are detrimental to the rights and interests of non-Muslim Malaysians".[22]

In short, the debate to overcome Malaysia's racial problems began to lose much of its heat when the Islamic formula was seen as part and parcel of the overall Islamization drive in the country. Once the proliferation of *dakwah* activities started to set off the alarm bell within the non-Muslim communities, efforts by ABIM and the rest to sell the Islamic approach to nation-building also backfired to the detriment of the Islamic cause. In the process, the Islamization programme of the *dakwah* groups and the government had created the problem it sought to solve.

Indeed, the efforts of both ABIM and PAS, and to a considerable extent the government Islamization policy, had spawned civil formation activities within the non-Malay non-Muslim communities. There was thus an enlargement of the overall civil society, partly as a result of ABIM and PAS *dakwah* work beyond the Malay community, and partly because of the new forays made by the non-Malay non-Muslims to resort to democratic means to safeguard their interests. The routes of freedom were utilized by both sides, resulting not only in more collective actions at the grassroot level, but also in enhancing traditional solidarity based on ethnic and religious considerations.

Notwithstanding the relative failures of ABIM and PAS, the Islamization policy launched by the various government bodies was able to achieve some measure of success. In spite of the fact that the Chinese and the Indians were not amenable to Islamic change, they were not wholly unenthusiastic about the incorporation of Islamic values and the expansion

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of Islamic institutions. By subscribing to an interest-free banking system and religious-based insurance policy, they actually had embraced the Islamic cause. The two institutions, the Islamic Bank and the Islamic Insurance (Takaful), were popular among Muslims and non-Muslims alike. In this regard, the government Islamization programme joins, to a considerable extent, with that of *dakwah* undertaken by the Malay Islamic activists.

The Islamists are also partly responsible for the lack of impact of the Islamization process with respect to race relations, so much so that *dakwah* among the non-Muslims had not gone beyond rhetoric. While the adoption of the Islamic approach underscored the priority the Islamic activists attached to nation-building along Islamic lines, the euphoria soon waned after the various *dakwah* groups were caught in a swirl of activities relating to Malay life. The *kafir-mengkafir* (allegation of infidels) issue was one of them, which greatly sapped the energy of the Islamists from all sides. *Dakwah* as a phenomenon too acquired a dynamism of its own in the context of the Malay political and economic struggle. Once the battle for the Islamization of the Malaysian society had been joined by a great number of Muslim Malays, *dakwah* became a contesting ground for Malay politicians and the like to outwit and outdo each other. "Outward" *dakwah* or proselytization among the non-Malays was one of its unintended victims, and was given an *ad hoc* character. To the Muslim Malays who have been all along critical of Islamization, the lack of concrete results from the activity shows that the Islamists only have a blind nostalgia for the Islamic past when they talked about re-living the Shariah.

ISLAM, ETHNIC RELATIONS AND THE FUTURE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN MALAYSIA

All said and done, the future of civil society in Malaysia remains good. Democracy which is cherished by all in the country will certainly allow for active citizenship among the people. The government electoral considerations too would make the ruling party submit to the dictate of the various religious groups. On top of that, many of these religious-based associations had their origins in pre-modern Malaya; thus with or without modernization, industrialization, and urbanization, they would continue to receive sustenance from their traditional sources of power, including the Malay *kampung* with its *gotong-royong* (mutual help) spirit and *waqf* endowment. In short, the religious and cultural pluralism of Malaysia is indeed a challenge and is not necessarily a burden to nation-building. For

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the Islamists, their attempts at building bridges across the various communities will persist, as Islam as a "mercy to mankind" enjoins them to preach its message of brotherhood to all.

ABIM now might not be as vociferous as before in articulating its concern about fighting communalism in the country, but other Islamic organizations are entering the fray to ensure the message of their religion is not lost. One non-Malay Islamic society, the Islamic Propagation and Converts Association (Darul Fitrah Malaysia) recently undertook to conduct its Friday sermons in Chinese, an unprecedented move in the context of Malaysia. With only about 200,000 Chinese Muslims or 1 per cent of the total population, such an initiative could go a long way to bridging the ethnic gaps between its two major races. It was a deliberate attempt on the part of the society concerned to educate the masses and to bring about a more civilized social relationship. Interestingly, certain Chinese schools have also set aside rooms to be used as prayer halls (*surau*) by their Muslim students.[23]

PAS which is now in power in the two states of Kelantan and Terengganu, conversely, has to rise to the challenges of administering its non-Malay non-Muslim populations with all their experience in democratic institution-building. Its earlier preoccupation with the defence of the societal realm has found its match either in the form of Chinese civil society activities undertaken by individuals acting in private capacities or groups working as movers of voluntary associations. Such issues as the ban on liquor, *hudud* penalties and the use of Chinese language, which on various occasions in the past had caused members of the Chinese community to take an ethnic stand, might drive them again and again in future to resort to democratic means in order to resolve the differences.

Even the government intervention on the side of the Islamists may not be a disservice to the *dakwah* movement, provided it is able to give security and stability to the country, *and* it is in a position to deliver the economic goods to Malaysians of all races. With the expansion of the national cake, there will be greater willingness on the part of the Chinese and the Indians to participate in national affairs, even if that means getting absorbed in the Islamization process. Consequently, the non-Muslims of Malaysia will probably be willing to show a greater level of tolerance towards *dakwah* if that also means material prosperity and a better future outlook. As such, the universal ideals of Islam would be actualized in the larger interests of the multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, and multi-religious Malaysia. Communalism, in other words, is both a problem and an opportunity for civil society development.

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Notes

[1] The Chinese were basically drawn by the prospect of economic opportunities, following the intensification of tin-mining, while the Indians came in to meet the country's labour requirements, in the wake of the opening of railway and rubber estates. The Malays, who were generally rural folks, were tied to their *kampung* (villages). See also Amarjit Kaur, "The Malay Peninsula in the Nineteenth Century: An Economic Survey", *Sarjana* 4 (June 1989).

[2] For an interesting discussion on the subject of the British role in the creation of a plural society in Malaya, see C. Hirschman, "The Making of Race in Colonial Malaya: Political Economy and Racial Ideology", *Sociological Forum* 1, no. 2 (1986).

[3] For more details, see Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Islam and Nationalism in Contemporary Malay Society", in *Islam and Society in Southeast Asia*, edited by T. Abdullah and S. Siddique (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1986).

[4] There have been several works published on the subject of communal politics in Malaysia. See, for example, K. J. Ratnam, *Communalism and the Political Process in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1965); C. H. Enloe, *Multi-Ethnic Politics: The Case of Malaysia* (Berkeley: Center for South and Southeast Asian Studies, University of California, 1970). More recent works include Tan Chee Beng, "Ethnic Relations in Malaysia in Historical and Sociological Perspectives", *Kajian Malaysia* V, no. 1 (1987) and Mohd. Nor Nawawi, "Ethnic Politics in Malaysia: Emerging Trends", *Plural Societies* XX, no. 3 (1990).

[5] C. H. Enloe, op. cit., p. 37.

[6] See also Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Islamic Revivalism and the Political Process in Malaysia", *Asian Survey* XXI, no. 10 (1981): 1046–48.

[7] For more details on PAS and its development as a political party, see for example John Funston, *Malay Politics in Malaysia: A Study of UMNO and PAS* (Kuala Lumpur: Heinemann, 1980), Chs. 4, 6, and 7 respectively, and Safie bin Ibrahim, *The Islamic Party of Malaysia: Its Formative Stages and Ideology* (Kelantan: Pasir Puteh, 1981).

[8] For a further elaboration on PAS' association with Malay ethnic nationalism, see Mohamad Abu Bakar, "Islam and Nationalism in Contemporary Malay Society", pp. 156–57, 160–62.

[9] Quoted in K. J. Ratnam, op. cit., p. 122.

[10] "Perpaduan Kaum — Formula Islam", *Risalah*, tahun 3, bil. 3 (1976).

[11] Chapter 49: verse 13.

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[12] See *Risalah — Juru Bicara Umat* (Kuala Lumpur: Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia, 1981), p. 24.
[13] Quoted in Farhan, "Anwar Menyelar Perpaduan Sempit", *Panji Masyarakat* (October, 1979): 6.
[14] See for example *Risalah,* bil. 6 (1980).
[15] C. H. Enloe, op. cit., p. 136.
[16] See "The End of the Road? No. Perhaps Not …" (Special Interview: Datuk Haji Mohamad Asri bin Haji Muda), *Malaysian Business*, November 1989, pp. 8–9.
[17] *Utusan Malaysia*, 4 August, 1981. See also "Interview with the PM: Think Anew, Think Big", *Malaysian Business,* October 1982.
[18] See *New Straits Times*, 8 December 1982.
[19] One writer describes this as "the nascent mobilization of non-Muslims in the face of perceived threat of Islamic dominance and expansionism". See Raymond L. M. Lee, "Patterns of Religious Tension in Malaysia", *Asian Survey* XXVIII, no. 4 (1988): 400. Perhaps it is more appropriate to view it as a delayed manifestation of the non-Muslims' dissatisfaction with Malay-Muslim rule.
[20] See Raymond L. M. Lee, "Secularization and Religious Change: Malaysia as a Testing Ground", *Sarjana* 6 (1990): 78.
[21] Quoted in Mohd. Nor Haji Nawawi, "Undang-undang Islam, Masyarakat Majmuk and Hubungan Etnik Di Malaysia", *Sarjana* 4 (1989): 143.
[22] Lim Kit Siang, *Selected Speeches and Press Statements March–April 1992* (Petaling Jaya: Democratic Action Party, 1992), pp. 210–11.
[23] *Berita Harian,* 2 September 1997.

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5

Islamization and the Emerging Civil Society in Malaysia
A Case Study

Sharifah Zaleha Syed Hassan

INTRODUCTION

In Malaysia, the Islamic resurgence of the 1970s, without doubt, is one of the autonomous forces that has contributed to the expansion of civil society. Responding to the call for a greater representation of Islamic values, norms, and identity in society, a large segment of the urban-based Malay middle class joined several religion-oriented new social movements which arose to challenge the basic premises of the state project of official nationalism, as well as to draw the public's attention to what Sheila Nair described as "the loss of religiosity and spiritual values among the state actors" (Nair 1999, p. 96). However, scholarly treatment of the phenomenon in relation to civil society formation tends to focus on the civic activities of major Islamic organizations, namely, the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia (ABIM)), the Jemaah Tabligh, and the banned Jemaah Darul Arqam, or Al Arqam in short. No doubt these national level organizations have played a crucial role in empowering and activating Muslims into participatory and political action. However, their emergence in Malaysia is but only one aspect of the Islamization process. The state, political parties, individual *ulama* and populist *imam* also participate in the process by promoting their own Islamization agenda. In other words, while it is not wrong to associate Islamization with the emergence of major Islamic organizations, it is also useful to consider those community-based religious organizations that have sprung up in the urban areas as they are also instrumental in instilling Islamically informed civic virtues among the people.

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To date, very little has been said about this aspect of Islamization and its consequences for the evolution of civil society in Malaysia. This chapter hopes to fill this gap by examining the micro-processes of Islamization in an urban community in Malaysia as an example of civil society formation in the Islamic context. Drawing on data gathered in my current research on the social history of Bandar Baru Bangi, a new town in the state of Selangor, Malaysia, the chapter will first provide an overview of the history and thrusts of Islamization in the country. It then discusses the direction and features of the Islamization process as it unfolds in the community concerned and how Islamization helps restructure social relations among people on the basis of civic principles. The chapter concludes by highlighting the essential characteristics of socio-religious organization as a form of civil society that is evolving in Bandar Baru Bangi.

ISLAMIZATION IN MALAYSIA: AN OVERVIEW

Malaysia is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious country. The dominant ethnic group in the country is the Malays who make up about 55 per cent of the total population. They are followed by the Chinese (34 per cent) and the Indians (12 per cent) (Nagata 1994, p. 65). One of the distinctive features of the Malaysian social system is the close link between Islam and Malay culture and politics. Ever since it was introduced some 700 years ago, the religion has served as a core element in Malay culture providing as Esposito and Voll say, "an integrated perception of religion, traditional values and village and family life" (1996, p. 125). As Malaysia (then called Malaya) moved towards independence in the early twentieth century, Islam became the rallying point for Malays to organize reform and political movements. In the process, Malay political parties and organizations emerged to compete with each other and the non-Malay counterparts for continued Malay political dominance in the evolving plural society. When Malaysia finally became independent in 1957, Islam was enshrined as the official religion of the country. Together with nationalism, Islam became a critical element in Malay cultural identity and a potent organizing force in the country.

Thus when Islamic resurgence swept across most of the Muslim world in the 1960s, it was no small surprise to find Malaysia also participating in the process. In contrast to other Muslim countries, Islamic resurgence in Malaysia was an ethno-religious phenomenon, in the sense that it was

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largely the Malays who were actively engaged in raising and revitalizing the people's interest in Islam, its teachings, laws, and values. A number of factors coalesced to prompt them to do that. One of them was the change in the material conditions under which the Malays were living as a result of intensified modernization and industrialization in the first decade after Malaysia achieved independence in 1957. Once rural dwellers, many Malays migrated to towns in search of education and jobs. In the urban setting, they were not only exposed to an acquisitive and materialistic culture associated with urbanism, but also became more conscious of the economic and cultural disparities between them and the non-Malays, in particular the Chinese. This, together with influences from countries such as India, Pakistan, Sudan, and Egypt, where Islamic revivalism had already taken place, caused certain segments of the urban-based Malay middle class to seriously consider issues arising from rapid economic growth and state-building, and subsequently formulate responses to them by recourse to Islamic philosophy and teachings. The pressing issues then were the legitimacy of foreign or imported ideologies and institutions in the development process, the efficacy of political parties as instrument of protests, the relevance of the simple equation of Muslimness with Malayness, and the role of the state as the definer of Islamic orthodoxy.

Among the forerunners in the 1970s wave of Islamic resurgence or the *dakwah* phenomenon, as it was known locally, were the earlier-mentioned Islamic movements such as ABIM, Al Arqam, and Jemaah Tabligh. These Islamic movements agreed that Muslims should re-examine Islamic theological sources, the Qur'an and Sunna of Prophet Mohammed for guidelines on how to resolve the above issues. They, however, differed in terms of the practical solutions that should be offered to Muslims to help them confront the secularization challenge. ABIM, for example, advocated the establishment of an Islamically-oriented social order as the corrective to secularism and capitalist-based development projects. The movement's Islamization programme was a totalizing process to be accomplished through education (*tarbiyah*) and mission work (*dakwah).* The Al Arqam movement established in 1968, and banned in 1994, envisioned the restoration of the ideal Islamic society that once flourished during Prophet Mohammed's time. Islamization to the movement meant progressive discovery of the self, society, and mankind which could be realized if Muslims were to relocate themselves in Islamic villages or communes. The Jemaah Tabligh, which originated in India and which had been in existence in Malaysia since the 1950s, focused on the spiritual development

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of individual Muslims. This loosely structured organization made it obligatory for its members, mostly men, to spread the Islamic message of moral solidarity among Muslims through *tabligh* activities.

Although the resurgents did not employ sophisticated language to urge for greater Islamization of Malaysian society, their call did not go unheeded by the masses and Malay-dominated political parties, namely the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia or PAS) and the United Malays National Organization (UMNO). Their religious consciousness stirred by the resurgents, Malays in both rural and urban areas started to observe the Islamic dress code, refrained from consuming food prepared by non-Malays, avoided food products believed to contain substances that were forbidden to Muslims, performed the *solat* (prayers) more regularly, and a host of other things. PAS, which had been clear right from the time of its establishment in 1951 of its desire for the Islamization of society, responded by reinforcing the resurgents' call to return to Islam. Its opponent, UMNO, the most influential member of the National Front, the ruling party in Malaysia, attempted to strike chords with the resurgents by paying more attention to Islam. Its Islamization programme ranged from the use of Islamic symbols and rhetoric to the creation of Islamic educational, banking, and financial institutions.

Looking at the Malaysian religious landscape then and now, it is obvious that discourses on Islamization embrace diverse groups and that Islamization means different things to different groups. The process is not fading. It, in fact, is intensifying as Malaysia becomes more connected to the rest of the Muslim world and as more Muslim intellectuals, trained locally and abroad, begin to transmit Islamic teachings and philosophy to the masses in an effort to support the state's Islamization policy or alternatively produce their own paradigms for change and development. The following section discusses how the process unfolds in Bandar Baru Bangi, an urban community that was opened for settlement in 1978, the time when Islamic resurgence was mounting in Malaysia.

ISLAMIZATION IN BANDAR BARU BANGI

Bandar Baru Bangi is a new town located in the state of Selangor, Peninsular Malaysia. Its development is a direct result of the implementation of Malaysia's post-independence urban policy, which among other things aimed at creating new growth centres that could serve as the site for industries, offices, and homes for the people. Bandar Baru Bangi is one of these growth centres. The town was developed in stages starting in 1977.

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The land on which it now stands was formerly covered with oil palms and secondary jungle. These were gradually cleared to make way for houses, factories, shops, offices, and a golf course. When Bandar Baru Bangi was opened for settlement in 1978, there were about 150 families of Malay professionals who were drawn through migration to work at the National University of Malaysia (Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia or UKM), University of Agriculture (recently renamed Universiti Putra Malaysia or UPM), and the few research institutes that were located nearby. Without any kin ties to one another, these early settlers of Bandar Baru Bangi occupied the houses that were built in*Fasa Satu* (translated as First Phase) of the town now considered as the oldest settlement. The number of settlers started to increase in the mid-1980s as more people, mainly Malays, moved into the town to avail themselves of the houses there, as well as to work in the factories, offices, universities, and training institutes found in and around the town. By 1990, the population of Bandar Baru Bangi stood at around 25,000 and rose to about 40,000 within ten years.

The development of Bandar Baru Bangi coincided with the resurgence of Islam. Near the town was UKM, the workplace of the majority of its early residents and one of the hotbeds of resurgent Islam. There students and lecturers who were swayed by the arguments for reforms mounted by ABIM, PAS, and the Islamic Republic Group regularly organized socio-religious activities to stimulate the students' religious consciousness and to protest against the state for its role in perpetuating western cultural patterns. Elements of resurgent Islam penetrated Bandar Baru Bangi through UKM being introduced to the fledgling community by several religious activists who worked at the university. They organized *usrah* (study circle) on a weekly or fortnightly basis in the homes of individuals to discuss and appreciate the relevance of the eternal truths embodied in the Qur'an and Sunna of Prophet Mohammed to modern times. In the absence of any other form of religious gathering, the *usrah* later functioned as a context for small-scale social gathering as the host usually served food after the discussion and people stayed back to pray. It was during such occasions that the religious activists influenced those present to undertake Islamically inspired community-based projects.

One of these projects was the creation of voluntary benevolent societies or *kumpulan khairat.* Two such associations were formed in 1979. Their primary concern was to provide their members with mutual assistance usually in times when death occurred in a family and help was needed to arrange for the funeral. The other project was the establishment of *surau* or a communal place for prayers. Towards this end, in 1980 the Selangor Development Corporation Authority, the government's agency that was

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entrusted with the responsibility to develop Bandar Baru Bangi was approached to "loan" one of the semi-detached houses in Fasa Satu so it could be converted into a *surau*. The agency concerned consented to the request. Thus, the first *surau*, called Surau Al Umm, was established in 1981. Several people were elected at a meeting to form the *surau* committee (*Jawatankuasa Surau*) with roles to co-ordinate the religious activities conducted at the *surau*. Within the general climate of heightened religious consciousness, the central appeal of this *surau* was the evening and night obligatory prayers performed congregationally and the religious talks that were conducted after the prayers. These occasions were used to forge a sense of moral solidarity among those present, as well as to reorientate them to a new way of understanding Islam than the established one. Islam was not just a set of rituals but a way of life and a workable doctrine for modern society.

The Islamization process in Bandar Baru Bangi started to intensify in mid-1980s. Three social currents accounted for this. The first was the state's Islamization policy. Since the co-optation of Anwar Ibrahim, the then President of ABIM into UMNO in 1982, the state had been actively communicating the messages that Islam was an important component of national development and that Islamization of society should be done in a spirit of mutual help and consensus. In short, the state was prepared to consider positively grassroots programmes of Islamization in its efforts to maintain an open dialogue with the Islamists. The second factor which had a bearing on the direction of Islamization was the proliferation of members of the Malay middle class into new growth centres in search of houses and jobs. Bandar Baru Bangi was one of those areas that accommodated them. Still culturally unconsolidated but economically well endowed, the middle class proved to be an important resource to help actualize Islamically inspired projects that were formulated by both the state and the grassroots. Finally, the 1980s also saw an increase in the number of *ulama* and Muslim intellectuals imbued with strong religious sentiments and possessing great capacity for organizing religious activities. These people were not just ready to apply their knowledge of Islam and skills to explain Islam to the masses but also to help mobilize the people into organizations.

These three currents impacted the religious life of the people of Bandar Baru Bangi in no small way. Guaranteed of state support, the religiously active people in the town mobilized economic resources to build more *surau.* To date, there are thirteen *surau* in Bandar Baru Bangi. Eight are housed in separate buildings and the remainder in apartments. Every *surau* is managed by a committee comprising of about eight to ten people and serves as the focal point of the religious life of the residents of the

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neighbourhood. The construction of *surau* in Bandar Baru Bangi is facilitated by donations collected from within and outside the community. The building or apartment which houses a *surau* and the land, on which it is located is usually donated by wealthy individuals. They are later classified as public endowments or *waqf*. The construction of *surau* on the basis of *waqf* is closely tied to the Islamic injunction concerning the importance of Muslims to do public good and embodied in three concepts that were and still are very widespread in Bandar Baru Bangi: the concepts of *sedekah* (alms), *amal jariah* (personal or collective conduct for public good) and *fardhu kifayah* (communal duty).

The entry into Bandar Baru Bangi in 1984 of an *ulama* with the reputation as an outstanding theologian, a religious teacher, and a practitioner of Islamic medicine further influenced the trend of Islamization in the town. The *ulama* was Ustaz Harun Din, a migrant from the agriculture-based state of Perlis and a former Professor of Islamic Theology at UKM. Given his religious background and social position, Ustaz Harun Din rose to become the religious leader in his own neighbourhood playing various roles as *imam* at congregational prayers, religious teacher, and counsellor. He also popularized the Islamic medicine concept and practised it in clinics housed in a building called Darus Syifaq. When his popularity as a healer increased, Ustaz Harun Din took to training men and women in the science of Islamic healing so that they too could practise Islamic medicine. He also encouraged men and women with some religious education to organize Qur'an classes for children and adults, thereby expanding religious learning and scholarship in the community. No doubt Ustaz Harun Din emerged as the principal figure of authority in Bandar Baru Bangi but at the same time there crystallized in the neighbourhood where he resided informal religious groups. Members of these groups were bonded to one another on the basis of their social and personal relationships with the *ulama,* their common rural origin, similar educational background, and common residential area.

The zeal for doctrinal and ritual purity which characterized the Islamization process in the 1980s coincided with an approval on the part of the state for the establishment of Islam-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) (Saliha 1997; Sharifah Zaleha 1999). In Bandar Baru Bangi, Ustaz Harun Din together with his friends and followers responded to the call by establishing the An Nur Welfare Association (Persatuan Kebajikan Islam An Nur or PKIAN). The main aims of PKIAN were to provide mutual assistance to its members, to dispense specific charitable services, and to supervise the affairs of a *surau* located in the

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neighbourhood where Ustaz Harun Din lived. This *surau* was called Surau An Nur. The charter of PKIAN acknowledged it as a component of this NGO. The PKIAN and Surau An Nur thus became the new bases for the religiously motivated people living in and around the neighbourhood served by the s *urau* to associate with one another formally and to collectively plan for more community-based projects.

Towards the latter end, PKIAN restructured Surau An Nur's administrative system. This it did by creating several committees each with a specific function to supervise the affairs of the institution. The core committee was called the Surau An-Nur Administrative Committee. Comprising of twelve men and three women, this committee was basically concerned with co-ordinating the performance of congregational prayers *(solat berjemaah)*, running religious classes, and organizing religious talks *(ceramah agama)*. Then, there was the Social and Welfare Committee which was entrusted with the responsibility to co-ordinate the social welfare activities that the *surau* engaged in, such as providing financial assistance to needy students, new converts to Islam, and other underprivileged groups. There was also the Youth Committee with roles to organize religious camps and counselling services for youths. The collection of donations and management of the properties of the *surau* were made the responsibility of the Finance Committee, while the Security and Technical Committee looked after the maintenance of the *surau.* Except for the An Nur Administrative Committee, which had fifteen members, the other committees had between three to seven members each.

The importance of the restructuring of *surau* administration is that there was an increase in community participation in the religious affairs of the community. Insofar as religious leadership was concerned, the new organizational structure helped spread it among many people instead of being concentrated in the hands of one person, that is Ustaz Harun Din. The people who were elected to sit in the various sub-committees were referred to by their friends as *orang surau* (*surau* person *or surau* people) precisely because of their deep involvement with matters pertaining to the management of the institution. They comprised of men and women between the ages of 30 to 65 and came from different occupational backgrounds. Most of them were elected on the basis of their sustained interest in religion, social position in society, and specialized knowledge in certain fields. Within the *surau* establishment, élite and non-élite, professionals and non-professionals, men and women, were integrated, some holding positions as *imam*, religious teachers, counsellors, treasurer, and maintenance men.

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Another feature of the Islamization process in late 1980s was the drive to diversify the services provided by Surau An Nur. In addition to providing a place for people to perform the *solat*, Surau An Nur also provided free lodging for poor students studying at UKM. It also helped procure cows for the ritual of sacrifice (*korban)* held in conjunction with the Aidil Adha celebrations, made travel arrangements for members and non-members of PKIAN wishing to perform the *umrah* (minor pilgrimage) and the *hajj,* organized study tours, and arranged short courses regarding the *hajj* for would-be pilgrims. In the ritual realm, the *surau* regularly conducted special prayers called *solat hajat* for individuals who had personal problems to overcome, as well as for school children who were going to sit for major examinations.

Perhaps the central appeal of Surau An Nur was the religious talks. Surau An Nur organized these talks regularly on a weekly basis and in conjunction with Islamic festive occasions. To deliver these talks, the *surau* usually invited religious officials and missionaries (*pendakwah).* The *surau* held two types of religious talks, one an elaboration of Islamic doctrinal matters and the other, an informed address of current social issues. It was the latter type of religious talks that provided Surau An Nur its distinctiveness. These talks were usually given by missionaries who were well-known political and social activists, and who would not hesitate to comment on current political and social issues with candidness. The fact that Surau An Nur could get these people to participate in its religious talks series distinguished it from the other*surau* in the town, attracted a lot of people and gave it great weight as a religious institution.

IMPLICATIONS FOR CIVIL SOCIETY

Based on the preceding discussion, it is obvious that Islamization in Bandar Baru Bangi involves giving institutional expression to the personal convictions of individual *ulama* and inspired religious activists regarding the importance of intra-religious development, religious learning, charity, and mission work (*dakwah).* With regard to civil society, the process has three important implications.

1. The process produces *surau*-centred social and religious groups that are capable of creating space for participation and action for the residents of the new town outside the sphere of institutional party politics. Participation in this space is not about accessing to political leadership but institutionalizing a religious culture which is firmly grounded in orthodox Islam and in which aspects of sharing, tolerance, freedom, rebelliousness, and collaboration are evident.

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Within this framework, there are two matters that are of great concern to the civil society that is evolving in Bandar Baru Bangi. One, the production of *mukmin,* that is Muslims who are highly devoted and capable of demonstrating unreserved belief and faith in the absolute truth of Islam. Of importance to the *mukmin* is how to strengthen his or her relationship with the Divine *(hablun min Allah)* and how to discharge social responsibility *(hablun min nas)*, not absolute freedom as desired by the civil society in the West (see Arendt in Kessler 1996, p. 76). Two, making the concept of giving and sharing the society's norm. That this norm is adhered to in the every day life of the people can be seen in the practice among some families of incorporating converts, needy students, troubled youths, and poor couples into their households, and regarding these people as adopted children or adopted siblings. By subscribing to these norms, the civil society makes traditional Malay Muslim virtues serve the modern and civil needs of the citizenry of the multi-ethnic nation.

2. Islamization as it occurs in Bandar Baru Bangi opens up quite a liberal and classless route to power for the Malays than otherwise possible in mainstream society. They can tread on this new route to status and power in a variety of ways. They can study Islamic medicine and become the students (*murid*) of Ustaz Harun Din. They can attend formal *tafsir* classes and informal study groups or join the PKIAN. The consequences of such endeavours for an individual's sense of well-being and social worth are enormous. Many men and women who are empowered with skills to make *doa* (prayers) for others, with religious knowledge to guide the others, and with links to Ustaz Harun Din usually find themselves better disposed, psychologically and economically, to participate actively in the social welfare activities organized from time to time in the community. It is this sense of empowerment that accounts for the readiness on the part of some of the community members to help resolve problems of juvenile delinquents, domestic violence, and moral decadence. The same factor also motivates several community members to establish collectively-owned grocery shops and bookstores, introduce rehabilitation programmes for new converts, and set up a foundation called the An Nur Foundation (Yayasan An Nur).

3. Islamization encourages greater reflection and debate on the nation's future by putting forward discussion of what it sees as common concerns such as social injustice, corruption, cronyism, and nepotism. Through the institution of religious talks *(ceramah agama),* the civil society calls on the state for public accountability on matters of public policy and questions the legitimacy of certain state actions and practices. This role of the civil society looms large since the occurrence of the Anwar Ibrahim crisis. The

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government takes its political discourses quite seriously because they can and have attracted the opposition parties, in particular PAS, and the earlier-mentioned national-based Islamic movements, in particular ABIM, and the Jemaah Islam Malaysia (JIM). Furthermore, civil society has been quite successful in expanding its membership which by now includes a large number of professionals comprising of university lecturers, doctors, lawyers, business executives, and engineers. Most of these people are religiously committed and politically quite influential. However, although able to impose its own Islamic code on the Muslim masses, civil society in Bandar Baru Bangi prefers to be regarded as pressure groups and partners in development with the state. So when establishing linkages, the PKIAN and Surau An Nur organizing committee undertake to form a loose coalition with the religious officials and related state agencies, such as the Department of Religious Affairs and the Islamic Research Centre, while at the same time co-operating with independent preachers and social activists.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, suffice it is to say here that the Islamization process in Bandar Baru Bangi is associated with the mobilization of community members into formal and informal associations and groups concerned with promoting charity work, mutual assistance, and mission work. The process has opened up opportunities for a large number of men and women from all levels in the town to become involved in the organization of Islam. In the present context, organizing the people's religious life is not just about getting people to perform the *solat.* It also involves getting people to support religiously sanctioned projects and economic enterprises for the good of all. In a country where the state exercises considerable control over Islamic matters, the ability of Ustaz Harun Din, the *surau* people and the PKIAN to establish and maintain a widely-based community management system should be appreciated. They also espouse an Islamic economic and human development strategy which is concerned with harmonizing religious beliefs with the urban economy and urbanism rather than one which is biased towards existing political parties. More importantly, they articulate the view that working for religious and social reforms can and should be done through peaceful means; and that if Malaysian society were to survive in this age of rapid development, then the country should consider resolving issues of identity, resource management, and lifestyle as foremost in its agenda for development.

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Notes

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PART III

MINORITY EXPERIENCE
Contribution of Muslim Civil Society to Civility

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6

Defending Community, Strengthening Civil Society
A Muslim Minority's Contribution to Thai Civil Society

Chaiwat Satha-Anand

INTRODUCTION

One of the most exhaustive academic treatments on the subject of civil society during the last decade is perhaps Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato's *Civil Society and Political Theory*.[1] It is interesting to note that in this 771-page volume, there is no reference to "Islam" or "Muslim" anywhere in its twenty-six index pages. Equally interesting, is the fact that a cursory glance at the index pages of some recent learned writings on Islam and politics such as Esposito and Voll's *Islam and Democracy*[2] and Eickelman and Piscatori's *Muslim Politics*,[3] "civil society" does not appear in there either.

In the controversial *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*,[4] Huntington maintains that there has recently been a significant development of Islamic social organizations. During the last decade, it is these Islamic groups which provide health care, welfare, and educational services to the poor and ordinary people in Egypt, Jordan, the West Bank, and Indonesia. Huntington writes, "In effect, Islamic groups brought into existence in Islamic 'civil society' which paralleled, surpassed, and often supplanted in scope and activity the frequently frailed institutions of secular civil society".[5] It is, therefore, quite surprising to find that in *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals*, written by one of the most respected scholars on Muslim societies — Ernest Gellner — Islam is considered incapable of achieving civil society.[6]

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There are several ways to critically appraise Gellner's thesis on Islam and civil society — his logic could be deconstructed or counter-evidence could be suggested. But in this chapter, Gellner's thesis will be called into question by arguing that in a non-Muslim society such as Thai society, it is a Muslim minority whose participation in a public conflict, relying on their particular history and Islamic inspirations, that could help bring about a stronger civil society in the country. I will begin by first situating Gellner's thesis in a larger Orientalist discourse that fails to recognize the contribution of the Muslims to the emergence of civil society. Then the struggle of the Ban Krua Muslims, a Muslim minority community in Thai society, against the Thai state's megaproject of constructing an expressway in downtown Bangkok which encroached into their residential space, will be examined. Finally, this Muslim minority's engagement in conflict, emphasizing the problematic connection between civil society and Islam, will be critically examined and its contribution to the process of strengthening the Thai civil society briefly discussed.

SITUATING GELLNER'S THESIS IN A LARGER ORIENTALIST DISCOURSE

According to Ernest Gellner, civil society is a set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state, especially in preventing it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society. As a site or space of complexity, choice, and dynamism, the existence of civil society is in contrast to political despotism. This is possible due to the fact that civil society is based on the separation of polity from economic and social life. This separation is crucial because in the absence of power wielders, there exists a spatial independence. Members of civil society can therefore act at a distance from political rulers. Consequently, they cease to be the rulers' subject and become self-transforming citizens.[7]

While Gellner's understanding of civil society is profoundly important, it has been criticized for conflating different forms of civil society together and discussing civil society in economistic and masculinistic terms. In addition, due to Gellner's neo-Popperian account of scientific progress, he "misses the elective affinity between post-foundationalist perspectives in philosophy and social sciences, the attitude of democratic scepticism and the horizontal diversity of forms of life that are characteristic institutional features of any civil society". [8] More importantly, his thesis that Islam is incapable of achieving civil society was said to be bordering on Orientalists' prejudice.[9] It is this point which I will now address.

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Many Orientalists believe that due to the lack of independent cities, an autonomous bourgeois class, and a network of institutions mediating between the individual and the state, among other things, the social structure of Muslim society is characterized by the absence of civil society. [10] This belief is informed by a particular understanding of three related notions which constitute a civil society: separatedness of society from politics, conflict between the individual and the state, and citizenship. If it is the spatial independence that separates a society from its power wielders which constitutes civil society, then Islam as a religion that emphasizes the holistic approach to all spheres of human relations, especially power relations both temporal and spiritual, could be construed as an arid ground for civil society. While the institutional arrangement that could mediate between the individual and the state is elemental to civil society, in Islam it is the relationship between a Muslim as an individual and the collectivity, that is, the *ummah* or community of believers that is of paramount importance. In fact, it could be argued that a Muslim individual derives his/her meaning from being connected to this collectivity. In this sense, Muslim society could again be seen as very different from a social platform that is conducive to a civil society. Finally, if it is the transformation from subjects to citizens that signifies civil society, then some Orientalists argue that the term "citizen" with its connotation of the right to participate in the formation and conduct of government was "totally outside the Muslim political experience, and therefore, unknown to Islamic political language".[11] The term "*madani*" which is then usually used in the place of "citizen" means something more like "statesman". [12]

Two decades ago, Edward Said had argued that Orientalism is based on a discourse of difference where the contrast between the Occident and the "exotic, erotic, strange" Orient is an expression of power relationship. The "Orient", especially knowledge about it, is comprehensible within a network of categories and concepts defined, and therefore controlled, by the Occident.[13] The "Orient" ultimately becomes a caricature of the other, drawn on the canvas of imagination relying heavily on the shadows of the self that is the "Occident". Concepts, categories, and criteria used to determine the existence or absence of civil society in the "Orient" are not free from their contextual influence, but instead are products of a particular history of the "Occident". Moreover, the anathema between Islam and civil society in Gellner's thought could result from his deep knowledge of Muslim society itself. This is because not all groups in a Muslim society governed by Islamic injunctions could be accepted as a legitimate part of civil society in the Occidental sense of the term. Seen in this light, "the absence of civil society in Islam" or "the incapability of

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achieving civil society for Islam" in Gellner's line of thought is not incomprehensible.

In addition to a critique of the Orientalist discourse, I would argue that the relationship between Muslims and civil society is more problematic due to the forms of government (e.g., authoritarian or "near just society", to use John Rawls' phrase) and the reality of Muslims as minority or majority in that society, among other things. In some senses, different forms of governments elicit different responses from groups working to strengthen civil society. Demonstrations in the streets, for example, will be high-risk actions for people under a dictatorial regime, whereas they are considered a normal course of action for those governed by a constitution which guarantees their rights to organize and freedom of expression. The reality of Muslims as a minority or majority group in society would influence different directions of civil society discourses. To be a Muslim minority, working towards the expansion of the social space of civil society where people's and communal rights are respected would, in general, contribute to a free society that would better allow them to lead their lives as Muslims, which is a more basic strategic issue than engaging in a debate to choose between the "western-biased" or a more "Islamic authentic" civil society.

John Keane has suggested that nearly a third of the world's Muslims live in countries where they can never hope to become a numerical majority. For these Muslims, there are three options. First, they can turn their backs on the world and live in accordance with Sayyid Qutb's instruction that there exists an abyss between the Muslims and non-Muslims. Second, they can lead their lives as Muslims by caring little for the immediate non-Muslims around them and choose to bond themselves with Muslims elsewhere in the world as evident in the strategy of the Jemaah Tabligh. Third, within their states, Muslim minorities could live their faith and espouse the cause of tolerance and liberties for all. [14]

Facing the power of the modern project in today's world, "turning one's back" no longer seems to be an option for Muslim minorities, or anyone else for that matter. "Choosing to connect with remote communities of believers", while increasingly feasible due to technological advancement, does not answer the question of how a Muslim should live his/her daily life in a society that is largely non-Muslim. A Muslim scholar, writing on some juristic aspects of Muslims living as minorities in non-Muslim states, suggests that there are three guidelines. First, whatever is *haram* (forbidden) in Muslim states remains equally unlawful for them. Second, whatever is *halal* (permissible) for Muslims where they are the majority remains equally lawful for them. Third, the principles of *dharurah*

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(necessity) would come into effect in the event of extreme compulsion. [15] "Espousing the cause of liberty for all", on the other hand, is an interesting option precisely because in working "for all", it transcends the demarcation line between the Muslim minorities and the non-Muslim society. Seriously considering this option will inevitably raise questions about the ways in which Muslim minorities connect with their larger societies. To think through this option in relation to the issue of Muslims and civil society, it is perhaps instructive to examine a concrete case of a Muslim minority defending their own community against pathological development in a non-Muslim society.

BAN KRUA: A MUSLIM MINORITY'S STRUGGLE AGAINST A MEGAPROJECT[16]

Bangkok, as a city of more than 7 million people, has various chronic problems. The most notorious one is perhaps traffic congestion. The diagnosis of this problem could be simple: too many people, too many cars, but not enough traffic space. According to the present Bangkok Governor, there are more than 4 million cars in Bangkok while there are only 2,812 km of roads of all types![17] The solution, in line with mainstream development thinking,[18] is to build more roads. With the first National Economic Development Plan some four decades ago came a strong urge to modernize the country so much so that most canals in the city, which used to serve as transportation channels and a natural drainage system, were filled with earth to build roads. Recently, numerous megaprojects such as the skytrain and underground mass transit systems sprang up in Bangkok as if the city could grow indefinitely. The expressway project is one such megaproject the government planned and carried out in order to alleviate traffic problems. But to build such a megaproject at a time when the city has been bursting at the seams with both rapid real estate development and demographic expansion is to risk a number of crucial problems. For example, appropriation of land already owned by Bangkok residents has become a costly endeavour on the parts of both the expressway builder and the administration. There are landowners who accept compensation, normally below market prices, without any fight. There are those, however, who would not yield so easily and have taken their cases to court for fairer treatment. But no other case of people who put up a fight against the expressway, and by extension, the development direction modern Thailand is taking without questioning, is quite like the fight of the Ban Krua Muslim community.

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Some might think of Ban Krua as one of Bangkok's 843 slums. According to the National Housing Authority, these 1.1 million slum dwellers constitute 14.56 per cent of Bangkok's population. [19] So when it was suggested that one of the exits of the second stage expressway has to cut through Ban Krua community, the choice for the authorities was obvious. On the one hand, there is this slum, a living space of poor people, and on the other, a modern road project that could help ease traffic congestion for people with cars. The people of Ban Krua, however, did not yield easily. They have argued all along that they would not want to obstruct an expressway megaproject which would benefit the public at large but believed that the proposed exit would only cut through their homes without being able to reduce traffic congestion as the authorities had claimed. This latter point was in fact supported by the opinion of a government-appointed neutral commission made up of several distinguished professionals. The fight of Ban Krua community has been going on for a decade. Up to now, that exit of the expressway megaproject has been successfully halted. It could not destroy this community, at least, not yet. But most recently, in April 2000, a deputy governor of the Expressway and Rapid Transit Authority (ETA) has stated that it was ready to proceed with land acquisition of Ban Krua where some 200 families will be affected since the handover deadline, October 2000, was drawing near. [20] On 21 December 2000, the ETA decided to hand the task of a new public hearing to the Office of the Commission for the Management of Land Traffic. The Office, however, objected to such attempt.

The question is why have they fought so hard for their community? Commenting on a columnist's remark that there are others whose land and houses were appropriated more than once under the cruel claws of these megaprojects, a Ban Krua community leader responded that Ban Krua means much more than houses because of the existence of an established community where everyone knows everyone. It is this rare homely atmosphere in the midst of the city that they cherish. [21] Such a strong communal sense has its historic root because Ban Krua community is a Muslim community of Cambodian descent which was founded at the beginning of the Bangkok period some 200 years ago. [22] In a great battle between the Burmese and the Siamese in the reign of King Rama I, known by the name of "the nine-army battle", the Cham (Cambodian Muslims) volunteered to fight on the side of the King. When the Burmese were defeated, in an act of appreciation, King Rama I graciously granted a piece of land to these Cambodian Muslims where they built their homes. Thus, Ban Krua community began 200 years ago as a village of heroes who

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fought and died for Siam and the King. Ban Krua residents also claim that as a Muslim community, they have built both a mosque and a cemetery which cannot be removed by virtue of their status as *waqf* property. Even if the expressway exit were to avoid both sacred grounds, a mosque without any community to sustain it with community-based social and religious activities would not mean much.

The Ban Krua community has fought the modern project using all types of nonviolent methods.[23] Sometimes they sent their letters asking for help from the government. There were times when they worked with the opposition to pressure the government in power. Internally, they organized themselves to protect their community with guards and patrol teams because as a slum, the community is susceptible to arson. In fact, there have been attempts to set houses on fire in Ban Krua, but these were put out by the residents themselves. During the past decade of defending their community, everyone has helped. Even children in the community have been trained to identify any suspicious occurrence or stranger. They have also organized cultural tours for members of the public to show their community life and indigenous Cambodian Cham cuisine and their refined silk-weaving skills, all of which help to project them as a unique community. These non-violent persuasive actions wisely tapped their cultural fountain and have helped gain much respect from non-Muslims who were welcomed into their homes in friendship.

When all these activities did not yield satisfactory results, they took to the streets. In April 1994, the community descended on the Government House, demanding to see the Prime Minister. They used all kinds of symbolic nonviolent actions to convey the message that they were serious about their fight and that they were willing to sacrifice whatever it takes to fight for their rights and for justice. For example, they called for a press conference and dug a grave in the community cemetery to show the Thai public that they were willing to lay down their lives in this fight. Prayers (*solat*) were offered before the demonstration. People put on their "Muslim" dress wearing turbans, *kapiyah*, or *hijab*. Some carried coffins covered with velvet cloth adorned with the Qur'anic verse: "Verily unto God do we belong and, verily unto Him we shall return". When they arrived in front of the Government House, they set up their makeshift community there. Compulsory prayers, five times a day, were offered in public for everyone to see. In addition, their protest letters were sent to several Muslim countries around the world.[24]

A noted non-Muslim lawyer pointed out that the Ban Krua struggle has three distinctive features. First, it is independent. It seeks outside alliances

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but does not rely on them. In fact, only moral support was emphasized. Second, the tone of the struggle has been peaceful and rational. They answered some emotionally charged remarks with studied silence. Third, the Ban Krua people were willing to negotiate with the government without losing sight of the reality of the situation and the limitations of the government. After three days, the Prime Minister came out to meet the Muslims of Ban Krua who greeted him kindly and with delight. Before he left them, they all made supplications (*doa*) asking Allah Almighty to bless him with wisdom to be able to distinguish right from wrong in order to benefit the country the most. [25]

For more than a decade now, the Ban Krua Muslims have been fighting to defend their community from development which tends to sacrifice the values of traditions, spirit, and community for the sake of dubious material gains. The fact that they have been able to halt the unnecessary expressway exit for some ten years is indeed, by itself, evidence of some success. A most salient quality of their nonviolent struggle is their resourcefulness in using Islamic religious practices and symbols to assert their identity as a Muslim community with glorious history serving Thai society valiantly in the past. They were extremely well organized with highly competent community leadership, well informed about their problems, creative in their communicative skills, and capable of constructing alliances. Most important, perhaps, is the fact that they have been able to sustain their fight all these years. This would not have been possible without perseverance nurtured by their Islamic culture and heroic history.

A number of newspaper columnists concur on the exemplary quality of the Ban Krua Muslims. They wrote that the Ban Krua Muslims' defence of their own community is "a fight of courageous people's warrior worthy of becoming future lesson", "an example for all to contemplate changes in Thai society", and "model for Thai civil society". [26] In light of the Islam–civil society problem discussed above, the Ban Krua struggle depicted in the press as "a model for Thai civil society" will be examined next.

STRENGTHENING CIVIL SOCIETY WITH PUBLIC CONFLICT ENGAGEMENT

Theoretically, I approach conflict with two basic assumptions. First, conflict is natural and can never be eradicated. The question is, therefore, how can people live with conflicts creatively and constructively? Second, conflict is not necessarily negative. In its positive manifestation, conflict could engender desirable social transformation. [27] The Ban Krua struggle is a

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case of a Muslim minority's engagement in conflict with the Thai authorities. The motivation for engaging in this conflict is to defend the community from what they consider as pathological development in the form of an unfair megaproject. As a Muslim minority with an aspiration to sustain their community living in a larger and fast changing Thai society, they have to "live with" the impending conflict. The means the Muslim minority community have used in this case have always been creative (e.g., organizing cultural tour and indigenous food fair). The Ban Krua struggle could be considered constructive conflict within Thai society.

It is indeed possible to connect with the larger society through constructive conflict between a Muslim minority and the state. I would argue that this connection through conflict engagement by the Muslim minority is conducive to the strengthening of Thai civil society for at least four reasons.

First, participation in the conflict between the Muslim minority themselves and the state, while political, would generate an emerging independent space away from the ruling political power, which is an important feature of civil society.

Second, the individual participant in such conflict no longer remains a passive subject of the state, but an active citizen shaping his/her own interest and destiny, which is generally agreed as another condition for a civil society.

Third, engaging in conflict against a state's policy or project reflects a determination to resist domination by state power. But to engage in a conflict of this nature, the Muslim minority community needs to be mobilized as a collective entity. The individual and his/her political will to fight, though crucial, is therefore less significant than the collective action carried out in the public arena. This, in turn, is both in line with the religious importance of the *ummah* and the strategic importance of collective action carried out in public, which is crucial for the emergence of a civil society.

Fourth, if a civil society is thought to exist where free associations which are not under state power could "significantly determine or inflect the course of state policy", [28] then the Ban Krua community's success in halting the state's megaproject for a decade amply reflects the existence of civil society.

While the ability to transform state policy through collective actions by individuals acting as citizens is an important element in the Ban Krua struggle as civil society, the other part of the problem under discussion is the Islamic component. In fact, it could be argued that these four conditions

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are realized because of the Islamic component of the struggle. The independent space in which the Ban Krua Muslim community operated in, away from the ruling power of the state, has been created because the community chose to reassert its identity which is founded on the Islamic religion and their ethno-history as loyal Chams who fought valiantly for Siam 200 years ago. In other words, the Muslim minority's identity in Ban Krua has been shaped both as a community of memory and faith. Being a community of memory helps connect them to a historical past that was, in turn, positively connected with a larger history of Siam/Thailand. Being a community of faith, on the other hand, helps create a strong autonomous social entity which could maintain a sufficient distance from the state's ruling power. Once their identity is affirmed, the process of their struggle involving mobilization, methods, and sustainability, was then extensively drawn from the repertoire of cultural resources that are primarily Islamic. The digging of the grave, the emphasis on the sacredness of the mosque and the cemetery, the Islamic dress code, the prayers, the Qur'anic verse, and the *doa* for the Prime Minister are evidently based on Islamic culture. In relying on Islam as the core component of their strategy, their Muslim identity has been strengthened. I once attended a Friday prayer at the Ban Krua mosque, the *qutbah* (sermon) itself on that afternoon was about the struggle to defend the community from the state's megaproject. If the Islamic component is quite crucial for the Ban Krua struggle, and this Muslim minority's conflict engagement reflects the existence of civil society, then it could be argued that Islam as a potent cultural source for conflict engagement does contribute much to the strengthening of a civil society.

CONCLUSION: STRENGTHENING THAI CIVIL SOCIETY

The message conveyed by this Muslim minority struggle is that the state's megaprojects in the future cannot be carried out arbitrarily without proper support by the public. To value public support signifies, in the final analysis, the importance of legitimacy, an acceptance of the limit of state power, and the empowerment of civil society.

It goes without saying that as a result of the democratizing process during the past two decades, the Thai political space has been sufficiently expanded to be able to accommodate different demands from various groups of people. But since the struggle discussed here has been carried out by a Muslim minority affirming their identity in the process, Thai society has been forced to come face to face with three basic facts. First, Thai society is not monolithic and minorities do have voices. Second, the

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reality of development in the form of the state's policy of constructing megaprojects needs to be confronted. Not only does this reality affect the minorities, but all members of Thai society as well. On the one hand, the Muslim minority appears to be fighting to defend their community but yet, on the other, this struggle has been carried out on behalf of all members of Thai society who are potential victims of development. There are times when a society has to choose between visible material gain and amorphous values such as the cultural existence of a people. In making an informed choice nurtured by considered empathy, civil society could grow stronger. Third, the fact that a minority could challenge, and in fact successfully resist, state policy for a decade should be a sign of hope for other free associations who are members of the majority in Thai society that they too could successfully engage in conflict with the Thai state in pursuit of participatory democracy. To be able to listen to marginal voices, making informed choices concerning structural problems, and hope for the empowerment of ordinary people could perhaps be conducive to the process of strengthening Thai civil society.

Notes

1 Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 1994).

2 John L. Esposito and John O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996). It should be noted that this study concentrates on issues involving the role of new-style Islamic organizations and their relationship to democratization process. In this sense, it directly deals with "civil society" although the term is nowhere to be seen in the index pages.

3 Dale F. Eickelman and James Piscatori, *Muslim Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1996). The authors' notion of "Muslim politics" includes the roles played by intellectuals, mothers, or government leaders, and meanings of concepts such as traditions, protest or symbolic space are examined. In this sense, it could be argued that "civil society" is dealt with although the term does not appear in the volume's index pages.

4 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

5 Ibid., pp. 111–12.

6 Ernest Gellner, *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and Its Rivals* (London: Allen Lane Penguin Press, 1994).

7 Ibid.

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[8] John Keane, *Reflections on Violence* (London and New York: Verso, 1996), p. 11.
[9] Ibid.
[10] See a critical account of Orientalism and the problem of civil society in Islam in Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Post-modernism and Globalism* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 20–35.
[11] Bernard Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 63.
[12] According to Lewis, the Greek *polis*, which he uses the word "city" in English, was rendered *madina* in Arabic. It should be noted that the Greek term *polis* means much more than "city" since it is the site or space where a human becomes human because he gains meanings through participation in affairs of *polis*. See for example, Aristotle's *The Politics*, trans. T.A. Sinclair (Baltimore, Maryland: Penguin Books, 1975, Book III, Ch.1–2, pp. 101–104). I would think that in terms of the production of meanings and connection between the individual as a part and a political community which is the whole, a *polis* has more in common with *ummah* than a city.
[13] Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978).
[14] Keane, op. cit., pp. 98–99.
[15] Abdur Rehman Doi, "Duties and Responsibilities of Muslims in Non-Muslim States: A Point of View", *Journal Institute of Muslim Minority Affairs* 8, no.1 (January 1987): 48. Elsewhere I have maintained that these guidelines are not without problems. See Chaiwat Satha-Anand, "Bangkok Muslims and the Tourist Trade", in *The Muslim Private Sector in Southeast Asia*, edited by Mohamed Ariff (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991).
[16] This section is based on a case used in a part of my paper: "Muslim Communal Nonviolent Actions: Exemplar of Minorities' Coexistence in a Non-Muslim Society" presented at the international conference on "Cultural Diversity and Islam" at the American University, Washington, D.C., 20–21 November 1998.
[17] Thai Development Support Committee, February 1998, p. 60.
[18] See a critical view of mainstream development in Saneh Chamarik, *Development and Democracy: A Cultural Perspective* (Bangkok: Local Development Institute, 1993).
[19] Thai Development Support Committee, February 1998, p. 27.
[20] *Bangkok Post*, 24 April 2000, p. 1.
[21] *Managers' Daily* (in Thai), 25 April 1994.
[22] Muslims in Thai society are not monolithic. There are, in fact, at least six lineages of Muslims in the country: Chinese, Persian, Indian/

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Pakistani, Arab, Cambodian, and Malay Muslims (see Chaiwat, op. cit., pp. 96–97). Using another criterion of classification, Omar Farouk, for example, points out that excluding the Malay Muslims who constitute the majority of Muslims in Thailand, there are at least nine other non-Malay Muslims: Haw, Javanese, Sam Sams, Baweanese, Pathans, Punjabis, Tamils, Bengalis, and Muslim-Siamese. See Omar Farouk, "The Muslims of Southeast Asia: An Overview" in *Islamic Banking in Southeast Asia*, edited by Mohamed Ariff (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988).

[23] Chalida Tajaroensuk, "*Krabuan Karn Kadkarn Krong Karn Tarng Duan Khan Tee 2 (Urupong-Rajdamri) Khong Choom Chon Ban Krua*" [Protesting Process of Ban Krua Community on Second Stage Expressway System Project]. M.A. Thesis, National Institute of Development Administration, 1996 (in Thai).

[24] *The Managers' Daily* (in Thai), 22 April 1994.

[25] Ibid., 3 May 1994.

[26] Ibid., 22 April 1994, 3 May 1994, and 25 April 1994.

[27] Johan Galtung, *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (Oslo: PRIO; London: SAGE, 1996), Pt II.

[28] Charles Taylor, "Invoking Civil Society", in his *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997). But there are others who long for the strong role of the state and do not believe that networks of associations could fulfill the tasks that have been the monopoly of the state's. See for example David Rieff's strong criticism of civil society in his "The False Dawn of Civil Society", *The Nation*, 22 February 1999.

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7

Islam and Civil Society in Thailand
The Role of NGOs

Preeda Prapertchob

INTRODUCTION

On 11 October 1997, millions of people in Thailand watched on television King Bhumipol Adulyadej perform the ceremony to hand over the kingdom's latest Constitution to the President of the National Assembly, Wan Muhammad Noor Matha. This new Constitution is widely considered to be the most liberal Constitution Thailand has ever known, offering the widest range of human rights guarantees as well as administrative decentralization in a manner unprecedented in the nation's recent history. Perhaps more important than the ceremony was the process of drafting this Constitution which involved extensive participation of people of all classes and professions. It is, therefore, befittingly called the Constitution of the people.

Another scene which also recently made a major headline on television screens all over the world was the visit of Dr Surin Pitsuwan, the Foreign Minister of Thailand, to Indonesia. He went in his capacity as APEC's official envoy, following his nomination at the APEC Ministerial Meeting in New Zealand, to negotiate with the then Indonesian President, B. J. Habibie, the prospect of the United Nations' peace-keeping mission to handle the deteriorating security situation in East Timor. He was warmly welcomed by President Habibie and succeeded in persuading Indonesia to allow the UN troops to move into East Timor to restore peace and to prepare for its transition to independence.

The above two Thai Muslim personalities, Wan Muhammad Noor Matha and Dr Surin Pitsuwan, illustrate in no uncertain terms the extent of religious freedom that exists in Thailand and the positive role that Muslims

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are able to assume in the kingdom. Although Muslims constitute a minority of less than 10 per cent of the total population, the Thai political system accords them equal rights and opportunities. It is this factor that has made it possible for two extremely talented Muslims to become the President of the National Assembly and to head one of the most influential ministries in the Thai Government. This, however, is not without precedent. Way back in the seventeenth century, during the Ayuthaya period, Muslims used to serve as the Chao Phraya Samuhanayok, a powerful official post which is the approximate equivalent of the position of present-day Prime Minister. Along with this they also served in another senior position which would be the equivalent of the present office of Foreign Minister. However, what is significant and special about the above-mentioned two leading Muslim personalities who have reached the highest rungs of public office in modern times is that both of them are products of a Muslim civil society movement, the Thai Muslim Student Association (TMSA) which was established in the 1960s to promote and preserve the collective interests of the *ummah* in Thailand in general and the educated Muslim youths in particular. Many of its former members have risen to become some of the nation's most successful politicians, university professors, executives, senior government officials, and businessmen.

THE THAI MUSLIM STUDENT ASSOCIATION

The TMSA in the 1960s played a leading role among the students organizations of the time in promoting organized student activism and popular political awareness, which eventually led to the student revolution of the early 1970s which toppled the military dictatorship of Thanom Kittikachorn in 1973. The achievement of the TMSA then was by no means an accident. It was attributable to good leadership and the long process of intensive training through some of their activities such as public speaking training and voluntary student work camps which created a pool of student leaders who later became leading community as well as national leaders.

The student work camps helped train good leaders. Besides giving the participants the experience of rural life and a proper and thorough exposure to and understanding of the issues and problems of rural development, these work camps also helped promote a sense of unity and fraternity among the participants who came from different disciplines, institutions, and backgrounds. Through these work camps, for example, engineering and architecture students would get the chance to help in constructing

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rural schools and village health centres, while agricultural students worked in agricultural extension. Medical students and students of public health would help in administering simple treatments to patients and educating the villagers on primary health care. Students majoring in education helped to teach in the villages. Good relations were cultivated among them during the period of the work camps and this was to have a far-reaching impact when they grew up and began playing an important role in society.

TMSA was not simply any ordinary student organization; it was also a "civil society" since it was an inter-university organization which was able to overcome the "institutional parochialism" which was prevalent at that time. The Muslim student leaders from different educational institutions and disciplines came and worked as members of the *ummah* who were bonded together by the belief in one and the same God (Allah) and who were pursuing the common goal of wanting to serve society in order to please God (Allah). They collaborated under the motto: "We are all brothers".

It is interesting to note that the TMSA avoided conflict with the government but instead sought the goodwill and co-operation of the government to secure its moral and material support. The members of the TMSA contributed in all kinds of ways including undertaking the management of projects themselves. Notwithstanding this, the organization had its ups and downs. The TMSA has evolved through various stages. When there was an increase in the number of Muslim societies in the various universities, the TMSA changed its role to that of a co-ordinating body for these associations. This was accompanied by a change in its philosophy. It began to switch more towards spiritual development emphasizing the need to develop the innate character of its members to be more Sufi-oriented, soul-seeking and self-restructuring (*Tarbiyah*).

THE ROLE OF TMSA IN THE NATIONAL STUDENTS MOVEMENT IN THAILAND

It is significant to note that since the 1960s Muslim student leaders, especially those active in TMSA, were also generally engaged in promoting student activism as a whole among university students in Thailand. This activism later led to the outbreak of the successful student revolution in 1973. Many of the Muslim student leaders also assumed leadership positions in the various student organizations. Some of the Muslim student leaders who were at the forefront of Thai student activism during 1967–68 include the following:

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i. Mr Supote Panprutametha, the Founder and the President of TMSA who was also the President of Dome Taksin (Southern Students of Thammasat University Association);
ii. Mr Somchai Sarowart, the Secretary of TMSA, who was the President of the Students Society of the Faculty of Commerce and Accountancy of Thammasat University;
iii. Mr Somchai Wiroonhapol, a TMSA committee member, who was the Head of Cheerleaders of Thammasat University;
iv. Mr Wan Muhammad Noor Matha, the Vice-President of TMSA, who was the President of the Students Organization of the Faculty of Education, Chulalongkorn University;
v. Miss Kusuma Hasanee, the Vice-President of TMSA, who was the President of the Girl Students Association of Chulalongkorn University;
vi. Mr Ismail Dollah, the treasurer of TMSA, who was the Treasurer of the Chulalongkorn University Students Body;
vii. Mr Wattana Kurusawat, a TMSA representative, who was the President of the Students Organization of the Educational College of Bangsaen; and
viii. Mr Preeda Prapertchob, a TMSA committee member, who was the President of the Students Council of Kasetsart University.

The above examples demonstrate how Muslim students, although being a very small minority in their respective universities, became the leaders of their student organizations serving in various capacities. It should also be noted that besides working for the TMSA they were also working for their university student organizations. There was an overlapping of duties and responsibilities which in fact helped strengthen the position and cause of the TMSA.

The Muslim student leaders were especially active in promoting student work camps which helped establish important links between the student community and the rural society. The student work camp was essentially a new student activity during those days and serious students who wanted to learn more about the wider society, rural poverty, and underdevelopment in the remote areas of the country were attracted to participate in this sort of activity. The TMSA student work camp was widely accepted among the students as the most outstanding camp activity in those days. The TMSA on their own managed to raise funds to the tune of 300–500 thousand bahts (equivalent to about 3–5 million bahts at the present time) for its work camps. During the period of the camp, they constructed school buildings

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and health centres, and offered various services to the rural folks. The TMSA work camps even drew the participation of dignitaries like the Prime Minister (Field Marshall Thanom Kittikachorn) and the Foreign Minister (Mr Thanat Khorman) who presided over their orientation meetings and evaluation sessions. The TMSA representatives also played a vital role in the various seminars held during the work camps.

It was not easy for Thai students to attend seminars or conferences relating to politics when the military regime was in power in Thailand. However, the Asian-Pacific Student Leaders Conference held in Singapore in 1968 was an exception when a group of students from Kasetsart University participated in this conference (whereas students from other universities, particularly from Thammasat and Chulalongkorn Universities, could not make it). Mr Preeda Prapertchob, the President of the Students Council of Kasetsart University, participated in the conference and presented a paper on the role of students in politics in Thailand. Soon after the conference, a meeting among the student leaders of some universities in Bangkok was organized secretly at Kasetsart University. Later Mr Narong Chokwattana, the President of Chulalongkorn University Students Organization, was chosen as the representative of the group to attend another student conference in the Philippines. The group soon developed into an informal group to discuss politics in Thailand and later it founded the Group of Student Observers to monitor the general election in 1969. As a result of the success of their role during the election, they felt that they needed to develop a more advanced stage of student organization. Mr Apinant Buranapong, a student of the Faculty of Architecture at Chulalongkorn University, and also a TMSA committee member, was chosen as a member of the working group to draft the constitution for the National Students Council. Mr Apinant came to consult Mr Preeda Prapertchob, the other TMSA member, who had the experience of drafting the constitution of the Students Council of Kasetsart University. Finally, the first draft of the constitution was prepared in 1970 and the National Students Organization was founded in 1971, with Mr Therayuth Boonmee serving as its first Secretary-General. It was he who successfully led the big anti-Japanese goods campaign. The student activism developed at this time eventually led to the student revolution of 1973. This episode of the history of Muslim student involvement, which constitutes an important part of the civil society movement in Thailand, apparently has not been thoroughly documented, which otherwise would have highlighted the significant role the TMSA members played in initiating an organized student movement in Thailand.

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HIJAB MOVEMENT

Hijab, or the modest costume for Muslim women which includes the headgear and long decent dress covering the whole body as prescribed by Islamic law, was once the most neglected principle among Muslims in Thailand. This type of attire was, in the past, limited only to the time of prayer or for the old people in the rural areas or for people who had performed the *hajj* and during particular Muslim festivities and ceremonies. It was never donned when they went to their offices, places of work, or schools. At the end of the 1970s, inspired by the Islamic revolution in Iran and the global Islamic resurgence, *hijab* consciousness was promoted and revived in Thailand. The promotion of *hijab* dressing was undertaken and the campaign was launched by Muslim activists who were already studying in the various institutions. These activists, in spite of receiving secular education, maintained a high degree of Islamic consciousness. Though the promotion started in the late 1970s, it was only in the late 1980s that it grew in popularity culminating in the so-called "Yala Teacher Training College Incident" when there was a conflict between the college administration and the students who insisted on wearing the *hijab*. This confrontation was at its peak in February–March 1988 when more than 10,000 people gathered at the Central Mosque of Yala and staged a demonstration to protest the banning of such attire by the college authorities. As a consequence of public pressure, eventually the student uniform rule was relaxed and special permission was given to Muslim students who wished to put on the *hijab*. Nevertheless, it was not until 1997 when Mr Areepen Uttarasin, a Muslim MP from Narathiwat who was then the Vice-Minister for Education, introduced a special rule for all schools in Thailand addressing this issue that the *hijab* became popular among the Muslims throughout the country. The reason why the *hijab* was initially opposed by the government was linked to the underlying concept of uniformity for people of all races and of all faiths advocated by the government to all its employees without exception. Government employees, as public servants, had to conform to the uniformity. The *hijab* movement managed to change the attitude of most Thai people to accept the fact that Thai society is pluralistic and that it is necessary to accommodate this pluralism in public policy. It was the change of official attitude towards cultural pluralism which was to have a major consequence for Thai national society. Since the favourable resolution of the *hijab* crisis it is now possible to see more Muslim women all over Thailand putting on the *hijab* although this is only done voluntarily.

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JEMAAH TABLIGH MOVEMENT

The movement of Jemaah Tabligh began in India during the first half of 1900 but came to Thailand in the 1980s. The purpose of the Jemaah Tabligh was to bring about the spiritual revival of the Muslims and the consolidation of their commitment to Islam through the regular practice of Islam modelled upon the life pattern of Prophet Mohammed. The movement is unique in the sense that it tries to shun away from the traditional conflict that tends to characterize the different schools of thought in Islam by placing more emphasis on the rituals of Islam in daily life such as daily regular prayers, remembrance of Allah (*zikir*) and *doa* for various occasions. It advocates a kind of on-going informal education for adults of all ages irrespective of their educational backgrounds. The method of teaching employed is simple. The followers of the movement listen to the *bayan* (teaching or lecture) of their seniors, practise the religious rites by following others, and behave on the basis of established rules. It is a group movement in the sense that the followers are organized in small groups of about ten to twenty members. Tabligh members move from one Muslim village to another invariably boarding in mosques. They lead a simple life and follow their leader (*Amir*) obediently. The route of the trip for visiting Muslim brothers in different areas is always planned ahead. The local people would be invited to listen to their *bayan* at the mosque where they stay. Others will be invited to join the *jemaah* by travelling together with them. The cost of the trip including food is borne by each individual. Major gatherings (*jor* or *istima*) are organized several times a year and a number of groups (*jemaah*) would get together recruiting more new people to their ranks and arranging new *jemaah*. Under this system the number of groups continually increases and spreads over to a wider area within the country and across national frontiers. These groups of people are quite conspicuous because they are usually made up of all men and dressed in the Indo-Pakistani, Arab, or Malay traditional attire wearing caps or turbans making them easily distinguishable from other people, Muslims or non-Muslims.

The Jemaah Tabligh is clearly a type of citizens movement or civil society. It is never organized by the government or the official Islamic committees. It is primarily a voluntary association of people from different places and age groups, with different educational backgrounds and varied economic statuses. The Tabligh members come together to lead a communal life for various periods of time as a mobile commune listening to the same lectures, eating and living together, drawn together by a common spiritual

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pursuit. According to their belief, one cannot wait for assistance from others alone to change one's fate and lifestyle but must initiate the change from within oneself. Although there are leaders (*Amir*) within the Jemaah Tabligh, the movement tries to avoid rallying around particular individuals or conferring on them excessive respect or loyalty, making it an egalitarian movement.

THE ISLAMIC MOVEMENT IN NORTHEAST THAILAND

In contrast to the southern and central regions of Thailand where the Muslims, regardless of whether they are the majority or the minority community, could influence the politicians or local administrators to do one thing or another for them, Muslims in the northeastern region are really a small minority. The region itself is the largest in the kingdom, in terms of both area and population, but there are not more than 20,000 Muslims out of the region's 20 million population. Basically, it is not a Muslim area and previously the existence of Muslims in the region was just unheard of. Among the pioneer Muslims who settled in this region were the Pathans who migrated from India (which later became a part of Pakistan) and earned their livelihood as cattle dealers, butchers, and other small business operators. This dates back to before World War II. Since the immigrants were virtually all men, they intermarried with the local women and, due to the nature of their vocation, they lived in a scattered setting throughout the northeast. Though many of them did possess the Islamic consciousness, their low level of education prevented them from seriously practising Islam and asserting a distinctive Muslim lifestyle. Many of their offsprings, through intermarriages with Buddhist women, became easily assimilated into Buddhist society.

An Islamic movement in the region was started in 1982 when a group of Khon Kaen University students conducted a survey of Muslims throughout the region. In the following years, Muslim Youth Camps usually held over a three-week period, were organized in the provinces of Surin and Khon, attracting hundreds of Muslim children who joined in primarily to receive Islamic education which they had not had the chance to obtain before. The experience from organizing the summer camps revealed that although it was possible to educate these children, what they acquired did not last long because when they returned home they would forget their lessons and could not put into practice what they had learnt. Later the Islamic Education Programme (IEP) for the northeast was introduced in the region when Islamic teachers were dispatched to live

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with them in the various places of the northeast. It started modestly with only four teachers but later the number increased to as many as thirty and they were sent through the northeast. Along with the IEP, monthly meetings were organized on a rotation basis from place to place. When a monthly meeting was held in an area, local people in that area would be called on to join the meeting and many issues relating to their community were discussed. It was out of these meetings that the idea of establishing mosques was discussed, following which the mosques were constructed in the northeast region, one after another. As a consequence of this development, currently there are twenty-three mosques (fourteen registered and nine non-registered) throughout the region. These mosques have emerged to become the new community centres for the Muslims of the northeast region supporting a number of socio-religious activities.

Besides the IEP, a Muslim Youth Centre was established in Udorn Thani province. The purpose of the Muslim Youth Centre was to create a place where Muslim children can stay and socialize in an Islamic environment which was generally unavailable in the northeast. The Muslim children there were sent to government schools for secular education during the daytime and, upon their return to the hostel, would receive Islamic instruction either in the evening or during the holidays. They lived and played together, and observed the daily regular prayers together. Leadership training was given at the hostel. The construction of the buildings of the Youth Centre was funded by the local Muslims in the northeast as well as from the contribution of Muslims elsewhere. However, the running cost for the centre was collected from the parents of the children. The amalgamation of the IEP and Muslim Youth Centre project in 1995 created a new organization called the Foundation for Education and Development for Muslims in the Northeast (FEDMIN) which is the only registered Muslim foundation in the region. Its scope of work covers Islamic education, youth training, mosque establishment, and community services.

The most recent function of the FEDMIN is in the area of community services. Realizing that the Udorn Thani Youth Centre is located within a predominantly non-Muslim environment, it was thought that it would be better to offer community services to non-Muslims living in the area, too. Therefore, a wide range of community services covering library service, sports training, and home economics training for the housewives have been offered to the people living in the vicinity of the centre. It was felt that this sort of community service, besides helping to render good services to the local community, would also help create a good image of the

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Muslims and Islam to the local people and promote better inter-religious understanding.

SYNTHESIS OF THE ROLE OF MUSLIM NGOs IN THAILAND

The Muslim non-government organizations (NGOs) in Thailand are represented by well-defined and -structured organizations such as the TMSA, student organizations, or voluntary organizations such as FEDMIN. They might take the form of a protest movement such as the case of the *Hijab* movement. But in some cases they might emerge as an amiable and peaceful movement like the Jemaah Tabligh. Whatever form these movements take they share one thing in common in that these movements are the movements of the common people with no official authority.

One lesson which is evident from these examples is that their achievement has only been through hard work and perseverance. In the case of the TMSA, although the members came from different universities, since they shared the same culture and held the same faith, they were united and were able to develop good leadership skills which made it possible for them to contribute greatly to their immediate and national society, both Muslims and non-Muslims. FEDMIN shows that even with a handful of members who lived separately and far away from each other, with a commitment of purpose they could still build up their own organization and work effectively throughout the region.

The *Hijab* movement, on the other hand, demonstrates that Thailand is not a culturally monolithic country and that the right to practise one's religion and to observe one's dress code should be respected. In any case, it has not been easy to secure such a right. In some cases the Muslims had to resort to a demonstration to express their grievance in order for the people in authority to listen. The process of settling the problem still lingers on until now. In the *hijab* case even at present it could not be said to have been settled completely and satisfactorily. But what is important is that through the process the authorities and the public became more aware of the problem and the necessity to address it amicably. Gradually more and more Thais, as well as government authorities, have grown to become sensitive and tolerant to the different styles of dressing preferred by those who wear the *hijab* either in the workplace or in the school.

With regard to the Jemaah Tabligh, although it became popular and was able to play an important role among the Muslims particularly in terms of strengthening the spiritual basis of the Islamic faith of its followers, it still could not convince the greater majority of Muslims on its viability because

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of its *modus operandi* which tends to negate the worldly aspects of life and involvement in other spheres of life such as politics, economics, technology, and other worldly concerns. The Jemaah Tabligh leaders contend that a strong Islamic faith would be the pre-condition for the salvation of the Muslim community. Its critics argue that the Jemaah Tabligh movement would weaken the Muslim community since many Muslims who are drawn to it would put less effort in their work and profession, preferring to spend most of their time with the movement. Out of this debate there are some people who try to seek a middle path. They try to accommodate both sides by joining the Jemaah Tabligh, but not as core members. Their motivation is rather for the sake of increasing their *iman* (Islamic faith) without, at the same time, forfeiting their existing lifestyle. It is obvious that even among the believers there is considerable diversity of views and approaches towards Islam. Civil society will help highlight and promote this plurality so that there can be peaceful co-existence in society.

It is commendable that the Jemaah Tabligh has opted for peaceful means towards resolving any conflict and would hardly argue with people of other organizations on how Islam should be propagated. The sense of understanding, tolerance, and accommodation with which the Thai authorities handle this issue has also helped to ensure the sustainability of the movement. From the government's point of view, the Jemaah Tabligh is not viewed as a security threat or a disruptive social force. Interestingly, Thailand has emerged to become a haven for many Islamic movements, including the Shi'ite sect, which would be considered menacing or unpalatable in some Muslim countries. The Darul Arqam movement which is prohibited in some other countries could operate freely in Thailand.

In spite of the various successes of the civil society movement among the Muslims in Thailand, there seems to be a general tendency among many Muslim organizations to be overdependent on the government and Islamic authorities. There is still a widespread general belief among Muslims that all problems could be solved by the government or the politicians. The current pervasive misuse of narcotic drugs within the Muslim community in Thailand, for example, has been left to the police, the Office of Narcotics Control Board (ONCB), and other government agencies to handle. The role of civil organizations within the Muslim society such as the mosque committee, local organizations like Tambon Administration Organization (TAO) and Parent-Teachers Associations has been conveniently overlooked. Besides a reliance on the government authority, the other source of dependency of the Muslims is on the Members of the National Parliament (MPs). Within the Muslim society there is a strong tendency to rely upon

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the national MPs for assistance and support. Most Muslims seem to believe that their MPs can solve all of their problems and therefore involve them in solving both local development problems as well as their own personal problems. This practice has had the unintended effect of undermining the concentration of the MPs in their main area of work as legislators. Likewise, local organizations in which Muslims have full control, have also not been effectively utilized to solve social issues which plague the community.

Mosques in Thailand, like those in many other countries, have also not been used effectively for the development of the community. Mosques have been used mainly for prayers which can only attract people on Fridays and during the Eid. The mosque should be used as a community centre just as it was done during the time of the Holy Prophet. To ensure that it assumes a better role in civil society, the mosque should be used for multi-purposes. The mosque should be the place for prayers, the place for Islamic as well as secular education where Muslim children and youth could come and learn things from the mosque library, attend tuition classes, and function as an information centre where data on the Muslim community is systematically collected and analysed. It should have an office for welfare management so that the handicapped, the aged, the orphans, and the poor could receive assistance from it. The management of welfare could be supported through the *zakat* system which has been institutionalized in Islam. In Thailand, the collection of the *zakat* has not been managed well and Muslims are free to voluntarily pay or not pay the *zakat*. The concept of "*Baitul-Mal*" has been interpreted in a narrow sense to be applied only to Muslim countries without taking into consideration the special condition of Muslim minorities like those in Thailand. To make civil society work, the Muslim community will have to develop its own financial resources.

The other area of interest for Muslim civil society is in the field of education. The new Thai Constitution as well as the new Education Act do allow the local community to manage the local schools themselves. This includes the identification and selection of the school curriculum which they consider most appropriate to their community. In such a case, Islamic studies courses could be incorporated into the curriculum so that Muslim children could learn about Islam in school and the community does not have to organize Islamic studies programmes separately as an evening class, which usually cause the children to get exhausted. Anyway, such a new change requires a well-designed curriculum which should be collectively and collaboratively thought out by Muslim civil societies

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comprising Islamic scholars, educational specialists, knowledgeable parents, and children themselves.

The existence of a flexible and religiously tolerant government and Buddhist majority is bound to consolidate further the development of a Muslim civil society in Thailand. Much now depends on how the Muslims and their leaders utilize this favourable opportunity to move forward Muslim civil society. The traditional division of the world by classical Islamic jurists into two diametrical societies, *Darul Harb*, the abode of war, and *Darussalam*, the abode of peace, seems a little out of touch with current realities. One wonders whether now is not the appropriate time to emphasize the need for a the third category, or the "Third World" in which Muslims and non-Muslims can live in peace and harmony with each other, enjoying complete freedom of religion. This will be the new challenge facing Muslims living in the dominant capitalistic and materialistic societies all over the world today.

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8

The Making of Civil Society Through *Waqf* Institution in Mindanao

Michael O. Mastura

Civil society — in a number of organizational networks apart from the nation-state — has become one of the most useful terms in our time. The early idea of "society" which at first represented the rulers and polity was associated with the conception of "nation". The addition of "civil" has given it a contemporary context by linguistic development.

As the title of this chapter may seem puzzling, I need to explain at the outset that the concept of *waqf*, or charitable trust, is well established and its institutional development has a structural pattern. As an embodiment of religious institution within a polity, the *waqf* is the only part of the *siyasat shari'a* (public policy) to recognize the dedication in perpetuity of property rights for any proximity to God as an ultimate aim. This prerequisite of "perpetuity" qualifies it as a public good.

CONTRIVING CIVIL SOCIETY

A recent national conference on "Civil Society Making Civil Society" has asserted that the Philippines is a strong civil society country compared to other countries where non-state organizations are found to be underdeveloped and/or controlled by the state.[1] In this nation of 72 million people, the number of documented non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and people's organizations (POs) totals 15,000.

In the Philippines, civil society is as much a product of voluntary private organizations as an outgrowth of non-state mobilizations that hold the promise of the potent force of democratization. NGOs as such constitute the basic component of civil society outside the direct control of the state.

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The emergence of civil society has been accompanied by a proliferation of NGOs and of rhetoric such as "transparency" and "empowerment".

In September 1999, in Manila, the Third Assembly of Civicus (a forum of 507 organizations from 92 countries) stressed the need to look for new relationships in the wake of changing roles of civil society organizations, business organizations, and government. The civic premise is that the business sector works to create civil society in partnership with government by taking upon itself the burden of "corporate citizenship". The forum focused on corporate engagement — how best business can promote the public good — making it possible to encompass the non-state institution of markets in contriving civil society.

A global-market expansion implies that with transparency there will be less inclination for graft in the government and the pursuit of profit at the expense of society in business circles. But the globalization movement introduces an idealized model of behaviour by intermediate institutions — those between the individual and the state — through which a pluralistic society can look to organizations for differing human needs and non-material satisfactions. The use of an ideological idiom such as "the more enlightened segments of society" in reference to NGO partners, however, betrays a slant towards western cultural promotion of civil society.

In the Third World studies approach, non-state institutions such as the media, the academe, religious institutions, or popular movements, including grassroots social organizations that exhibit a capacity to maintain autonomy from the state, are clustered as a part of that civil society. Still, the relation of that civil society to the sovereignty of the people remains rather ambiguous. It remains a dilemma as to how civil society paves the way to let other people retain their cultural identity while diffusing any ambitions to challenge the existing power structures.

MUSLIM MOVEMENTS IN MINDANAO

The interface between NGOs and ARGs (armed revolutionary groups) has raised the question: are they also part of civil society? Two movements exist among Muslim communities in the Philippines yet both are running parallel to the emergent civil society.

At one extreme is the struggle of *political Islam* for a power relationship in which the embodiment of authority at the state level has to be made operational affecting social values. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) represent this cause. To the extent that such revolutionary groups advance the cause of political Islam will be presented as public dissent regardless of governmental

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response. A case in point is the entry into discussion of the so-called "Islamophobia". We would need to digress to examine the ramifications of legitimate dissent by "freedom fighters" and of protest action by "parliaments of the street" against the anti-terrorism bills.[2] So far, Salamat Hashim who heads MILF speaks of an "Islamic state" as an abstract power agency. Our discussion here directs attention to the neglected fact that the theorem of democratic pluralism derives from recognizing cultural diversity.

At another end of the spectrum is the movement for renewal of *institutional Islam* in terms of societal role or patterns of behaviour that have to be exercised in public life. Such institutions are, by definition, non-state, although they embody the dynamic relationships of influence in a way that policy processes occur in and around them. On closer examination, our discourses as NGO actors and Islamic activists for civil society have come to recognize the impact of the educational institutions embodied as *waqf khairiah*, or pious endowments for social welfare upon Islamic movements in Mindanao.

It does not matter if there are stumbling blocks to Muslim intellectual discourses for non-state institution when we verify its authenticity. In order to face up to contemporary challenges, we look for social bonds not simply at social benefaction. One well-endowed institution with *waqf* properties that, as a model, has withstood the weakening of hierarchy or *order* is the University of Al-Azhar in Cairo. As we conceptualize it, the phenomenon of "public space" in which the state, market, and individuals intersect with what is taken for "common good" is not startling at all to Muslim society in Southeast Asia. This is the chief point to grasp. Whatever the social gaps or loopholes, they are patched up by "civic space" whenever neighbours talk to each other or individuals work together. [3]

And there is much of *interest* in the Islamic principle of public interest or *mashlahah mursalah*. In this chapter, we draw attention to such Islamic egalitarian institutions and cultural heritage as would accord a citizen of a democracy not simply inchoate individual welfare but true economic advancement, notwithstanding the inequities perceived in the dominant capitalist system. By extension, there is a correspondence of ideas between *mashlahah mursalah* and the "general welfare clause" found in most constitutions of Southeast Asian countries.

WAQF INSTITUTION WITHIN PHILIPPINE POLITY

The "communitarian" aspect of property rights in Islam can be applied to concrete situations in Mindanao where there is a balance of private versus public interest. Socially "obligatory duties" in Islam are justified according

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to the principle of *fard kifayah* to apply distributive justice.[4] As *waqf* is a form of bequest, it transfers wealth from private ownership to communitarian beneficial ownership for social action: education, mosque construction, health care, and social security.

Al-Khairiah (registered with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) as the Islamic Welfare Society of the Philippines, Inc.) asks very different kinds of questions that elicit various comments. When Al-Khairiah began its work in 1988, it was groping for direction. After a revision of its strategic planning, only at the networks level was it able to set up new instrumental structures to establish Islamic institutions relative to the republican state. The management staff were encouraged to participate in various consultations of the Philippine Support Service Agencies (PHILSSA). Thus, it took part in the formation of the Caucus of Development NGO networks (CODE-NGO). It continues to be active at the regional structure level of the Mindanao NGO Coalition for Development (MINCODE).

Al-Khairiah got a major boost in 1991 when substantial endowment funds were set up through corporate philanthropy from Abu Dhabi. As a result, the Mosque and Madrasah Building Fund Scheme was instituted and a capital build-up strategy through the Waqf Property and Management Plan was proposed. This development had tremendous implications for its accounting system:

> Since the making of *waqf* is identical to the bequest in many respects, a great part of what is called *waqf* comes, in fact, as a bequest and therefore is generally subjected to its rules and regulations. At institutional level, it signifies the extinction of the *waqif*, or dedicator — donor's ownership in the thing dedicated — and the detention of the thing in the name of Allah in such a manner that its income/fruits are applied to the benefits of man and society.[5]

The consequence of this view of a charitable trust for ideas about beneficial ownership in *communitarian* form is far-reaching. It is the shared values for social efficiency and remains interwoven with religious life and social economy. The principles of consensus and private interest are combined to render more concrete the dedication of *waqf* (pl. *awqf*) for the purpose of *qurbah* or good work proximate to God (*Al-muqarrabun*).

Over the years, the Muslim Education Programme (MEP) of Al-Khairiah focused on a directed plan of action to offer alternative Islamic educational facilities. At the start, a number of selected *madrasah* campuses were

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identified as key structures in relation to the goals of the MEP. To date, Al-Khairiah has continued to provide organic linkages for twelve assisted-sectarian schools (*madaris*) and two boarding school-orphanages (*aytam*). In 1991, it was decided by the Board of Trustees that a single campus pilot institution would be incorporated as a non-stock educational foundation under the name Sultan Kudarat Islamic Academy Foundation, Inc.

Located at the town of Sultan Kudarat, in the province of Magindanaw, the old *pangajian* was initially developed as a family-administered *madrasah*, operated and registered with the Ministry of Education and Culture. With great zeal, the Academy pursued the recommendations of the First World Conference on Muslim Education held in Mecca in 1977 as an attempt to close the gap resulting from any cultural duality. The critical feature known as the*madrasah* system of learning (MSL) continues to be pursued at the Islamic Academy with a new curriculum development thrust.

The substantial growth of Al-Khairiah made it imperative to realign the operating workload into sustainable entrepreneurial activities. The corporate arm of Al-Khairiah to pursue its economic activities is the Moro Gulf Food Industries, Inc. This is a wholly-owned and -managed corporation established in 1992 to gain experience and expertise in Muslim enterprise development. In line with the endowment strategy set by the Board of Trustees, Al-Khairiah retains beneficial control of the *waqf* funds and properties. Proceeds from brokered funds other than the *waqf* funds are strictly segregated in order to safeguard those intended for beneficiaries identified by the *wakif*.

ETHNIC ADVOCACY FOR CITIZENSHIP

The need to reinvent society in a civil society perspective must be studied with regard to its bearing on citizenship. There is nothing in Asia similar to the story of the Civil Rights Movement of coloured peoples in America to combat racism. But it is impressive enough that the Japanese tycoon Isao Nakauchi once lamented the absence of the concept of citizenship in Japan. Starting from this point, it is not a simple matter to provide an economic definition of citizenship.

For a broader perspective, let us consider that Nakauchi was evincing rather than evoking a self-conscious assertion in dialogue with the American management *guru* Peter Drucker. Admiring those men and women who came to accept responsibility for addressing problems in order to secure freedom and citizenship, he felt the Japanese people have had little time in which to develop that concept of citizenship. "There is no perception that

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freedom carries with it the duty to act without self-offering, self-discipline, and self-responsibility as a citizen of the state," he explained.

There is a similarity that the Muslim grassroots members of the community in Mindanao also consider "citizenship", if anything, an alien term. It begs the question: is it a problem of definition or an inadequacy in language? We turn to the findings of the NGO research for the Philippine Democracy Agenda Project. Ethnic preferences overlap with their membership in the religious community. This data, relevant to either the insider or outsider phenomena, merely highlights the multi-layered outlook for social identity construction relative to an understanding of "citizenship" in body politics. After all, we learn that post-modern citizenship increasingly means "only two things: to vote once in a while, and to pay taxes all the time". And so, I can only agree that that is not enough to maintain a democracy.[6]

Yet it is equally important to keep in mind what ethnicity might spawn through organizations that are determined to assert their sub-nationalist aspirations. Such ethnic impulse does not necessarily arise from lack of patriotism. This fresh (or renewed) impulse repudiates the 1960s *integrationist* premise of the national community concept and resurrects the form of community that focuses on family, clan, church, village, and voluntary association. It makes sense that by the 1970s, social scientists had to coin a term for it, "small-republic spirit", in order to stress that the idea of national community entails a call for unity and public-spiritedness. This paradox limits each type — social form of life — as to the possible mode of association that can accommodate both community and hereditary order. Thus, religion is pushed to the realm of privatism.

To understand how democracy can provide the transition from ethnic society to true citizen's society, institutional factors may in fact determine the core of citizenship awareness and the ethnic advocacy of it. Good citizenship entails obedience to lawful authority. There is a certain clear-cut neatness in the Qur'anic injunction to obey "God, the Prophet, and *those in authority*" (*ulu-l-amr*). One might only comment that Islam is more total as a social movement but the schema of the traditional Moro social structure encourages multi-tier Muslim-Filipino civic identity.

Such a multi-layered affiliation — family, clan, and religious sub-nationalist identity — among ethnic grassroots in reality translates to what we might call "multi-tier societal bonds" that diminish their civic consciousness. So it surfaces over time that "public goods" which will affect every individual are not really talked about as social problems in the traditional communities, family, and kinship system. Surely, safety

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conditions, fire protection, sanitation, education, and other social amenities are desirable needs which affect the Muslim community as well as indigenous people.

Here lies an imposition of cultural norms. An ambiguity in the Filipino value system subsists — in that it tries to promote conformity with a modern (read: liberal) way of life and at once demands of those at the bottom of the economic ladder, that they alter their position within the social structure. And, indeed, social mobility may be purchased at the cost of family loyalties. Such norms encourage the dualism of cultural personality. Yet it is the individual duty of a traditionalistic society to pass on to posterity the incremental advantage of heredity.

ORGANIZED SOCIAL LIFE

Democratic citizenship involves more than demands for participation in majority decision-making when asserted in the inverse form of "civil disobedience" for mass action. This chapter argues that in the Philippines there is a kind of reanimation of the debate on church-in-politics realized in NGOs that were originally church-based opposers to martial rule. Measured in terms of direct participation, religious activists/advocates have been selective, often invoking critical collaboration. In the decades following the transition from dictatorship to democracy, these NGOs started to reposition themselves for the new democratic space.

Are these NGOs and POs now eroding the positions of elected officials who represent civilian authority? How then should civil society be organized for resolving conflicts and achieving social goals? Increasingly, the literature on NGOs points out that the questions contain within themselves the connected issues of accountability in governance and civil society. From a global perspective, there are critics who are concerned to show that the NGO-based civil society is "the fundamentally apolitical, or even antipolitical, concept of single-issue activism". [7] It is pointed out that NGOs have become a "third force through which the traditional hierarchy of state and subject can be unseated".[8] Here, a crucial issue is raised: that NGOs are accountable to no one except to their members and donors. Because they are not accountable to the public, it is the fund providers that will decide ultimately which civil society groups represent the people.

What civil society is, according to conventional explanation, signifies "an organized social life" that is voluntary and autonomous from the state. There is no point arguing why civil society is bound by a legal order, considering that the Philippine NGOs' constitutional and legislated status

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are uniquely situated. Whether private or public sector, the decision-makers are already providing new ways to look at concepts like "community" and "common good" to create a true citizen's society.

The dynamics of government and intra-civil society relations tell us more that NGOs and PO-based civil society are becoming alternative political and social development agencies that serve as active "interlocutors of the state" and "generators of social welfare". Coalition-building, drafting of action agenda, subjecting various documents to consultation, and elaborating on policy options are some of the ways that give NGOs exposure to the processes involved in the bureaucracy. Civil society — or one of its segments — is sustained by patterns of socially-required behaviours through which roles, expectations, and rewards are ascribed and non-governmental actions are taken.

FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY

All organizations justify themselves socially to fill a need or want. For purposes of our analysis, the basic types of organization are classified into social institutions and economic institutions. With the exception of the business sector, other social institutions are justified *only* by social needs. It is given that organizations engaged in a socially desirable end receive support from voluntary and non-voluntary donations.

A framework of analysis can be graphically represented by all the institutions that have sprung up for the purpose of nurturing civil society. Karina C. David maps the terrain of institutions/agencies into developmental, traditional, and ideological to delineate the components and the intersections between state apparatus and civil society entities.[9] Table 8.1 categorizes the complex organizations that have arisen to satisfy societal want or to fill a need. Table 8.2 delineates the organizational forms of the various sectors forming civil society in the Philippines.

Those in Category I render social services consistent with the needs of society at a cost the general public is willing to pay. An example is a mosque receiving voluntary financial and non-financial contributions from its members based upon its intrinsic value to them. Similarly, law enforcers gain non-voluntary support from public funds and voluntary dues from the enlisted police officers.

Those in Category II find social needs to fill but only in those areas that expect some economic reward. Civic clubs, corporate foundations, or non-voluntary organizations backed by the business community are normally

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TABLE 8.1
Basic Types of Organizations

Societal Want	**Social Institution**	**Category I**
Spiritual/Moral guidance	Religious	Private
Economic and social order	Governmental	Public sector
International security	Military	Public sector
Domestic security	Law enforcement	Public sector
Corporate philanthropy	Charitable	Voluntary/Non-voluntary
Informed public	Educational	Public/Private
Aesthetic values	Cultural	Private initiatives
Competition/Health	Athletics	Private initiatives
Societal Need	**Economic Institution**	**Category II**
Goods and services	Business sector	Profits
Labour services	Trade unions	Private interests
Basic services	Basic sectors	Non-profits

Source: The modified list of major groupings is taken from the *Philippine Democracy Agenda*. See Miriam Coronel Ferrer, vol. 1, and Karina Constantino David, vol. 3.

TABLE 8.2
Sectoral Types of Organizations

Organizational Form	**Non-State Institution**	**Group Category**
Non-governmental organization	NGO-based civil society	Private initiatives for advocacy, services, etc.
People's organization	PO-based civil society	Group interests
Denominational church	Religious institution	Organized religion
	Academe	Educational services
	Media	Public opinion
Political and social movements	Parties/lobbyists	Special interest groups
	Ideological forces	Revolutionary groups
Corporate philanthropy	Non-profit Institution	Foundations
Families and clans	Basic communities	Trusts/endowments

Source: The groupings by type of social institutions is adapted from Robert Grandford Wright, *The Nature of Organizations* (1983).

supported for their own interests. And yet, a humanitarian cause or research work may be supported for its social value by private business, government, university, or foundations.

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The first characteristic of civil society is that in governance it pursues public rather than private ends. If we look at what civil society has to offer to its constituent citizens, it is an option apart from anything governmental. Media, including opinion-makers and pressure groups as well as lobbyists, are "structures of powers" in mass activity with demands upon the political system.

Observe how Philippine civil society is undergoing a transformation — into contradictory democracy that we refer to as collegial governance. Speaking of empowerment, it is contrived as an organized authority opposite the civilian government representing civil authority. Governance is the act of decision-making about institutional purposes. As it happens, public policy can be thought of as a series of actions that are directed at recognized social problems. To determine when civic action is or is not part of a "policy" poses some dilemma, for example, when non-governmental institutions actually might be "making" policy. Such discussion might be useful only when we are ready to accept a shift towards private-sector-led policies. Current micro-level case studies have centred on empowerment and policy implications.

The second characteristic of civil society is that in organic form it represents the social rather than the public sector. If civil society concerns are viewed as affecting other institutions, it stands to reason that transnational interactions shape the character of civil society.

The meaning of governance and the stated purpose to work for the "common good" is of critical importance. For this reason amongst others, NGOs have been criticized for relying too heavily on foreign donors or for even acting as proxies, thereby eliminating from the public consciousness any notion of the "common good". One questions why the more progressive discourses of NGOs seem to appropriate exclusively this term, hence denying that charity-oriented civic organizations or profit-oriented groups such as the corporate sector can embrace civil society.

A particularly interesting corporate philanthropy is the Philippine Business for Social Progress (PBSP) that reinforces "social arrangements" in which service providers become conduits of fund for charitable foundations. PBSP member firms have learned to factor in the "social costs and impact" of their business activities into their decision-making. This is a leverage that might lead to a different view of social institutions, as promoted by trade unionism for instrumental motivations towards collectively ascribed roles. In alliance with NGO support service agencies (such as the CODE-NGO), non-profit organizations have moved together to elevate both civic duties and social responsibilities almost into communities' rights.

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With the growth of civil society, the leading business executive Jaime Zobel de Ayala openly admits: "The way we do business has changed, … we have learned from the voluntary sector how to build commitment and motivation among our workers". [10] If we push this point to its logical course, corporate wealth is coming ever closer to private-sector non-profit organizations.

BASIC COMMUNITIES AS A CATEGORY

How do we make families stakeholders in society? To encourage them to participate in community-based programmes is indeed to provide the members with a stake in their own societal role. Such efforts are sustained when social inadequacies are overcome through community organizing (CO) and by participatory action research (PAR). Transposing CO-PAR into the context of Islam requires a social policy paradigm (*siyasat madaniyah*) to effect transformation of power relations at micro-level structures such as family, gender, etc.

On a broader social sphere, the Philippine Democracy Agenda Project included "basic communities" as a category under its operational definition of civil society. The main message of the post-modern approach is that a community embodies a set of relations that cannot simply be relegated to other institutions or movements. Its critical thrust is to mobilize ethnicity, religion, and culture whose "voices" are usually drowned out by the more organized groups with political skill and social efficiency for community organizing.

Social justice issues and social reform agenda at basic communities level have often attracted pastoral initiatives due to widespread poverty in the Philippines. It accounts for such movements as the Muslim-Christian Dialogue, Duyog Ramadhan, Kadtuntaya, and Mindanao Ulama-Bishops Forum to name but a few. It is visibly seen in the guiding presence of Catholic priests and Christian pastors among the basic sectors or workers' community and ecumenical community organizing programmes.

In contrast to the continuing evolution of the "social sector" which is discussed later in this chapter, the basic Muslim communities have not kept pace. At this point, only Al-Khairiah and Tanmiyah can claim to be both non-profit institutions and social networks with Islamic content. Sabab and Tabligh are examples of Islamic religious organizations that have looked inward to recruit a mass base only to move over to the arena of political activity, thus attracting both civil servants and professionals who saw in it a route to influence. The absence of preconditions for the emergence of social networks requires further comment.

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Social problems and concerns associated with national minorities are historically lumped together with child labour and women's issues, especially by international bodies. Basic research indicates that today some are active in human rights agenda and gender-sensitivity fora. Within the basic sectors, they share a common weakness: they all lack social efficiency and that is a function of their mobility.

One can say that restricted mobility is a form of mis-education. And so the lack of an ethnic minority's own organizing efforts has restricted their access to the human-capital market. Overall, the *bangsamoro* (a substratum beneath Islam) people and certain other minority groups (such as indigenous people) suffer from social insecurity. Because they lag behind in investment in human capital through education, they have a shortage of educated people.

If this is a major factor that has not fully mobilized traditional society into the workforce for social and economic good, then neither has the social security. It is said in reference to unemployment that modern society can depend less and less on family welfare. In recent decades, the protection of migrant workers' rights has overtaken unequal power relations in the workplace. Certainly, current collaborative initiatives of civil society are leading to a different view of social institutions but are decidedly geared towards collective action backed by mass protest. Through a "collective voice/response institution" mechanism, the labour sectors have succeeded in fundamentally altering social relations in the market economy. "Voice" refers to the use of direct communication "to bring actual and desired conditions closer together".[11]

SOCIAL SECTOR INSTITUTIONS

Can social problems and social challenges be converted into profitable business opportunities for the social sector? Can there be institutions of the social sector to restore the community?

Such questions invite corporate curiosity. Drucker thinks it is an ideal solution in a period of major transition such as the one we are living through. This passage captures its essence:

> For the majority of social and community problems, we need special institutions, the ones I call the institutions of the "social sector". Normally, they are called "non-profits". It is usually believed that they represent "charity". Increasingly, however,

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> these institutions are not being financed by charity, that is, by voluntary donations. They are, instead, financed as contractors to governments, or they are financed by charging fees. [12]

A specific example of a social sector institution being financed as contractor is the voucher system. Such a scheme permits parents to use public funds to send their children to private schools of their choice.

The idea of introducing "choice and competition" into public education is novel. It makes us reconsider consensus and legitimacy. Due to budget constraints and operative limits, this solution to the poor performance of the public school system is partially implemented in the Philippines, for example, the Educational Service Contracting (ESC). Since it serves to expand parental choice, the educational voucher becomes an instrument in itself to regain control of individual responsibility.

Through volunteer work in the social sector, Drucker believes that one can regain citizenship. As it is, "corporate citizenship" espoused by Zobel has the making of that analogue institution of the social sector. Such convergence of responsibility for the common good remains a contradiction: *incorporation* versus *individuation* of the person.

To come to terms with this paradox, let us consider the Meiji Restoration and the Bunjin culture. Meiji Japan understood that education creates social mobility. Again, in their dialogue, Drucker reminds Nakauchi that a hundred years before Meiji, the *new* Japan was already created by the Bunjin circles of scholars who established private schools. To him, the Bunjin were the "social sector" of the Tokugawa society. And the lesson, he says, of the Meiji story is the need for a social sector that rebuilds the community on the basis of individual performance and of concern for the community.

The Meiji also converted the religious groups, both Buddhist and Shinto, into organs of the state. The point is not so much that the community-service tradition disappeared in Japan, but that religious individualism and privatism ensued. The Japanese, we could suppose, readily identified with individualized civic obedience but what of the sense of *kokutai* rising in obedience or ceremonial deference? Contemporary Japan does not exhibit it in the polity but in the economic sense: in the idea of incorporation and in the institutional device of mutual corporate shareholding.

So it seems perfectly sensible when, for instance, Nakauchi bemoans today that the Japanese believe, or at least understand, freedom as something guaranteed by and dispensed by an "absolute authority" without "self-responsibility" as a citizen of the state.

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There is a kind of re-inventive incorporation of "hierarchic and tradition-directed society" — to borrow a phrase from Theodore Friend — in reference to this point. Call this "social authority" as the Filipino scholar-bureaucrat Pardo de Tavera, who admired Fukuzawa Yukichi, had advanced decades ago to the Japanese Research Commission on the Philippines. [13] Where corporate citizenship combines with ecclesial authority's sectoral/community-wide social reform agenda rather than as sectarian interests (such as the Bishops-Businessmen Conference) what we have in place is a social sector institution.

For Muslims in Southeast Asia, a first-hand experience of individuality and of responsibility, and of societal body authority runs through the narrative of the Sufi's journey. The *turuq* or independent societies that were outside anything official — hence, in the path of the ruler's influence or of the trader's commerce — link up their chain to the Sufi circles of the region. The Sufi masters were what we would today categorize into "non-states" and "non-profits". The Muslim sectors of each country may have varied experiences but there is a commonly shared *mazhab Shafei* tradition.

Traditional *pondok pesantren* (boarding schools) and *madaris*, or sectarian schools normally attached to the mosque, instituted with the aid of benefactors and charitable trusts, have maintained a close association with the successors of their original founders. Among the *madaris* there are an organized but limited networking activities.[14]

BETWEEN INDIVIDUALITY AND INDEPENDENCE

This brings me to the point of making sense out of the *madrasah* system of education when juxtaposed with modernity (in the sense of liberalism). In my capacity as Committee on Education member in Congress, it dawned on me that part of the problem is the use of the teaching profession to focus on individuality. But one does not teach individuality because one is supposed to learn independence. So it is ironic then to discover that nationalist historian, Renato Constantino, who traced the roots of mis-education of the Filipinos to the patterns of cultural invasion and colonial education, put the blame on the élite for making it their own preserve.

The more enduring hallmark is the movement of the élite invariably from the private sector to government bureaucracy. It has never been the other way around. Who then owns education? Consider that the government subsidizes higher education on a selective basis. Social policy demands,

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too, that lower education be compulsory and free up to secondary level. Universities are often monopolies in certain geographical areas when no other institutions provide a substitute for higher learning. Even though state institutions exist in Muslim Mindanao, privately-owned and church-run schools have dominated non-public education. The reconciliation of freedom and community are carried on in the educational system both for communal and liberal society.

The Moro Front's demand for control of instruments of social order, like the school, police, health, and welfare agencies, moves closer to home base. One intractable issue concerns whether to integrate the *madaris* into the mainstream Philippine educational system. It is on the agenda of the Mindanao peace negotiating panels (GRP-MNLF and GRP-MILF). An NGO-based monitoring team sees the two aspects: making public education a *madaris* system, and making the *madaris* a government school. Others simplify the issue as the introduction of religious education into the public schools, at the same time implementing the so-called two-two plan of the curriculum.[15]

Indeed, a child's early education is generally at home or in the neighbourhood through the *madrasah* system of learning where the fundamentals of religion are introduced. This Arabic-Qur'anic-based learning system is unique as an institutional type, and it is here to stay. At the heart of the *madaris* issue is the need to restore the function of Islamic education in the social life of Muslims. In a consortium with able partners, the Sultan Kudarat Islamic Academy operates for Al-Khairiah in its pursuit to change individual attitudes towards socio-economic conditions. It aims to propel the process of *tajdid*, or renewal, as well as stimulate the practice of *tazkiyah* or growth in its totality. A link is being established with the Madrasah System Learning and Training Centre in order to achieve the goal of the Mindanao Basic Education Development Project (MBEDP).

Suppose we consider the private profitability of setting up a consortium to support the *madrasah* system of education. The social costs and the social benefits will then have to be factored in for making the calculations. The time to debate policy option is past. At the Islamic Academy, long-overdue advocacy agenda are being turned into real-life data — student flow patterns, understanding of programmes being offered, institutional linkages, and so on. At a more basic level, actual experience at the Islamic Academy indicates the need to interface requisite religious instructions, curriculum content for general education, and professional subjects with a system of elective courses.

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SUMMARY

Over the past decade or so, civil society has become the locus of discourse. Civil society ranges from private to non-state institutions, voluntary sector to non-voluntary, and non-profit corporate forms.

Discussions of the category of social institutions and forms of social life validate the proposition that civil society, including social sectors and religious-cultural ones, are constituents and re-creators of civil society. I have sketched actual experiences to illustrate how an ethnic community has mobilized *waqf* properties and *madaris* to revitalize an Islamic institution of the social sector.

Private interest is most applicable to the modern (read: liberal) society but corporate philanthropy has devised new social sector institutions to balance it with public interest. I have cited "corporate citizenship" as an instrumental motivation towards socially required behaviour that can sustain the non-profit institution of the social sector.

The legitimacy of NGOs and POs as basic units of civil society is recognized in the Philippines. I have presented the nexus of the relationship between individuality and sociability in terms of the dynamics of governance, of market, and of civil society.

Additionally, this development may be said to introduce the *bago-pamikiran* or new thinking, even within the circles of *ulama*. Specifically, this shift has jibed with my own changed career path "out of formal politics into social and educational activities". [16]

Notes

[1] See *Philippine Democracy Agenda* published in three volumes by the Third World Studies Centre, University of the Philippines, Quezon City, 1977. vol. 1, *Democracy & Citizenship in Filipino Political Culture*; vol. 2, *State-Civil Society Relations in Policy-Making* ; vol. 3, *Civil Society Making Civil Society*. Also, Tadashi Yamamoto, ed., *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community* (Singapore and Japan: ISEAS and Japan Center for International Exchange, 1995).

[2] Maria Socoro I. Diokno, "State-Civil Dynamics on the Anti-terrorism Bills" in *State-Civil Society*, vol. 2, pp. 147–78, discusses the drift of national discourse as it raised the spectacle of state terrorism under martial rule. The Anti-Subversion Act is now repealed in the Philippines.

[3] This insight is applied in inter-religious encounters. See Carmen Abubakar, "Inter-religious Dialogue and the Making of Civil Society" in *Civil Society Making Civil Society*, vol. 3, (1997), p. 190. I note that

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confusion can arise in political theory because in the Aristotelian seed of ideas his claim is that the highest form of life is *politikos* — political, which in its familiar Latin translation is *civilis* or civic.

[4] A conceptual frame is discussed by Muhammad Nejatullah Siddiqui, "The Role of the Voluntary Sector in Islam", in *The Islamic Voluntary Sector in Southeast Asia*, edited by Mohamed Ariff (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1991) at pp. 2–6. See Syed Othman Alhabsi, "Waqf Management in Malaysia", ibid., at pp. 118–37.

[5] This statement in the Annual Report finds authority in Islamic banks audited reports. I used also, as reference, Abdulaziz Mohammed Zaid, *The Islamic Law of Bequest* (London: Sorpion Publishing Ltd., 1986), pp. 165–69. Also, Mohammad Zain bin Haji Othman, *Islamic Law: with Special Reference to the Institution of Waqf* (PM, Religious Affairs Division, Kuala Lumpur, 1982).

[6] Wahab Ibrahim Guialal, "Perceptions of Democracy and Citizenship in Muslim Mindanao", in *Democracry and Citizenship*, vol. 1. Also, Karina Constantino David at vol. 2.

[7] David Rieff in an article that appeared in *The Nation* expressed this view. Originally, at the "Third International Workshop on Governance", Sam Moyo of Zimbabwe noted that most NGOs are single-issue focused and anti-intellectual due to impatience with theoretical approaches.

[8] Quoted from Elizabeth Liagin, "Reinventing Society: Civil Society", *Impact International* 29, no. 8 (August 1999), cf. David Rieff's article in *The Nation* on this point. Liagin counters that the "constituency-building process inherent in civil society programmes bears an eerie similarity to cold war-era clandestine operations". She is referring to attempts to "privatize" political change.

[9] Karina Constantino David, "Intra-Civil Relations, An Overview", in *Civil Society Making Civil Society*, vol. 3, pp. 21–50. See particularly Figure 2 on structural alternatives and transformative actions.

[10] Speech at the Third Civicus World Assembly held at the Philippine International Convention Centre, 21–24 September 1999, reported "Government and Business: Working to Create Civil Society", *The Philippine Star*, 4 October 1999.

[11] Albert Hirschman used this term as a basic mechanism for social and economic problems in *Strategy of Economic Development, Exit, Voice, and Loyalty* (1986). A host of overseas Filipino workers cases expressed public outrage as in the Contemplacion case. The Sarah Balabagan controversy became a sensational one touching on issues directed at the Shariah court justice system in the Gulf States.

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[12] A dialogue between Peter F. Drucker and Isao Nakauchi published under the title, *Drucker on Asia, a Dialogue* (Butterworth Heinemann, 1997), p. 143.

[13] The Report of the Research Commission on the Philippines was published under the title, *The Philippine Polity: A Japanese View* , translated by Takeuchi Tatsuji and edited by Theodore Friend, Monograph Series No. 12 (Southeast Asia Studies, Yale University, 1967). The quotation is taken from the editorial essay entitled, "Kokutai and the Philippine Polity". Pardo de Tavera suggested the term "social authority" to the Commission.

[14] A survey reported that there are 2,000 *madaris* throughout the Philippines. There is a Federation of Arabic-Islamic Madaris but the organizational linkage is weak, hence my proposal for an MSL consortia.

[15] This is really a recurring issue about which I have written much when I was Deputy Minister for Muslim Affairs. Saripada Tamano and Eliseo who are members of the SPCPD have both addressed it recently. See Eleseo R. Mercado, *Mission and Dialogue* , NDU Occasional Paper Series 2, pp. 115–20.

[16] Cf. Robert W. Hefner, "Islam, State, and Civil Society: ICMI and the Struggle for the Indonesian Middle Class", *Indonesia* 56 (1993); and Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998), on political leaders shifting to educational activities.

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9

Islam and Civil Society
A Case Study from Singapore

Sharon Siddique

INTRODUCTION

In Singapore, the main preoccupation with civil society lies in defining state–society relations. This generally takes the rather benign focus of "exploring the potential for achieving … state–society synergies".[1] When the issue of civil society first emerged into the public arena in the early 1990s, Brigadier-General George Yeo, then Minister for Information and the Arts, preferred to use the term "civic society", rather than "civil society". He defined "civic society" as occupying the stratum of social life between the state and family.[2]

By the end of the decade, the term "civic" had given way to "civil", and Minister George Yeo was defining civil society as occupying "the space between the family and the state".[3] The demarcation between family and civil society is clear — civil society begins where family ties end. However, the point at which civil society ends, and the state begins, is much more ambiguous. In Singapore, this contested space between civil society and the state is currently being negotiated. Two of the primary continuums along which these arguments flow are represented in Figure 9.1.

With reference to the vertical axis in Figure 9.1, organizations that operate exclusively within one particular ethnic, religious, or cultural community are at one end of the continuum, while organizations which focus on national issues and interest groups are at the other end. The second axis places those organizations that are government-funded at one pole, with those which are self-financing at the other. An attempt to map the various civil society organizations in Singapore is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper.

Both national and ethnic/communal organizations are monitored to ensure that their activities are not perceived to jeopardize the harmonious

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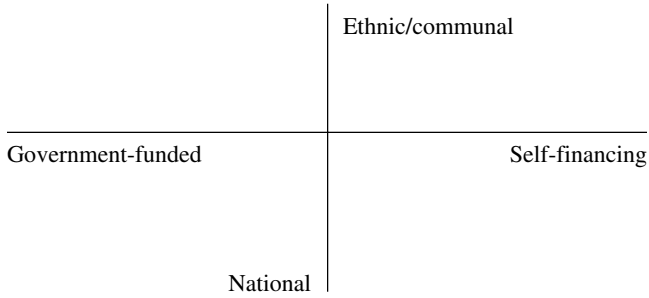
FIGURE 9.1
Primary Continuums of Civil Organizations



multi-ethnic, multi-religious model of tolerance, the perimeters of which are set by the state. If an organization accepts no government funding, then its relationship with the state is clear — it functions independently, as long as it respects the above-mentioned perimeters. If an organization accepts government funding, then its relationship with the state is more difficult to define. The state demands public accountability for the use of these funds. In this negotiated space, it is necessary for an organization — irrespective of whether it is ethnic/communal or national — to demonstrate that the publicly-financed activities facilitate or enhance government policies and programmes. In other words, the goals set by the organization, even if they are aimed at a particular religious or ethnic community, must be congruent with national goals.

A special category of ethnic/communal organizations has been promoted by the state to cater to this function. From the 1980s a number were founded — MENDAKI (Council for the Development of Singapore Muslim Community), followed by the CDAC (Chinese Development Assistance Council), SINDA (Singapore Indian Development Association), and the Eurasian Association. In 1991, a second Malay self-help organization — the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) — was set up by a group of young professionals who felt that "MENDAKI had not been sufficiently proactive in tackling the community'' problems. [4]

All these groups have a common agenda — to galvanize their respective community's support for the national agenda of promoting the conditions for market-oriented growth. Each community is tasked to uplift its own community. But the goals are shared: upgrade the skills of the community's labour force; attain higher educational achievement for the community's

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student population; and alleviate social problems which prevent the community from achieving competitiveness in the economic and educational fields. They all appear to be much more integrated vertically within their own communities than they are horizontally integrated with each other.

How civil society functions in the Singapore context is complex. One way to gain a better understanding is to focus on one particular civil society organization. This chapter will therefore describe the AMP, which would be located in the box "ethnic/communal", with a mix of "government-funded" and "self-financing" in Figure 9.1.

OVERVIEW OF THE AMP

A closer look at the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) allows a more detailed view of how the system functions in Singapore's Malay-Muslim community. Singapore is a wired society. Most Singaporean organizations, both public and private, as well as many individuals, have websites. The government has set the standard, and the most impressive is <http://www.gov.sg>. Websites are professionally constructed, interactive, and with elaborate hyperlinks to affiliates and associates. The AMP website is no exception.

The AMP website <http://www.amp.org.sg> provides a convenient map which can be used to explore how the AMP officially perceives itself, and the language it uses to express these orientations. A website is graphic in the same way a map is. It reduces complexity.

The AMP was established in October 1991, as the direct result of a brainstorming National Convention of Singapore Malay-Muslim Professionals, which was held in October 1990 and attended by around 500 participants. The AMP's vision statement clearly places it on the ethnic/communal end of the continuum: "AMP's vision is to bring about a model Muslim minority community". The AMP funding comes from a unique mix of government grants and commercial activities.

Scrolling through the website materials, it is obvious that the AMP presents itself in a transparent and straightforward manner. Information is very detailed. Alternative communication channels, including telephone numbers, fax numbers, street addresses, as well as e-mail addresses, are user-friendly. From the home page, the visitor can click on to a cyber counsellor "if you have something to get off your chest", or a vox box "if you have any enquiries, comments or feedback". There are also hotlinks to "check the latest websites through a friendly link provided by AMP".

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The AMP's vision is further elaborated in its mission statement:

> AMP's mission is to play a leading and active role in the development and long-term transformation of Malay/Muslim Singaporeans into a dynamic community taking its pride of place in the larger Singaporean society. It is a community that is educationally excellent, economically dynamic, socially progressive, culturally vibrant, and politically influential.

The AMP views *Malay/Muslim Singaporeans* as a *dynamic community* within a *larger Singaporean society* — in other words, as a component of a multi-ethnic, multi-religious society. The goals it sets in order for the community to be transformed into a model community are quintessentially Singaporean, in the sense that they have become the commonly established national goals to which all of Singapore's ethnic communities aspire:

- educationally excellent;
- economically dynamic;
- socially progressive;
- culturally vibrant; and
- politically influential.

Of the AMP's goals, the first four receive the greatest emphasis, and are more fully articulated. In the Singapore mindset, they are interlinked. In meritocratic Singapore, achieving a level playing field in the education system, and ensuring that Malay-Muslim children perform on par with children of other ethnic groups (Chinese, Indian, and Eurasian) is the AMP's primary preoccupation. Enhanced educational performance, in turn, is perceived as the key that unlocks the door to better job opportunities, and higher incomes. Levelling the playing field also entails striving to alleviate the social problems linked with poverty and low education and low income, such as drug problems, divorce rates, and absenteeism. Economic success in turn makes possible the achievement of the AMP's broader social and cultural aspirations for the Malay-Muslim community.

For the AMP, again reflecting the general Singaporean world-view, this mission is emphatically future-oriented:

> In the 21st century, knowledge and skills will become outdated faster as technological development accelerates. Our youths' future in tomorrow's economy hinges on their ability to continually learn and acquire new skills.

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The AMP's organizational structure and legal status also conform to a uniquely Singaporean pattern. In Singapore, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have the choice of registering themselves as a society under the Societies Act, or as "a company limited by guarantee".

Thus the AMP is not just structured like a company, it is a company. In Singapore, such a company can also apply for the status of an Institution of Public Character, which allows it to register as a charitable organization. This has important implications on taxation and fund raising.

Moreover, the AMP is in the process of becoming a holding company. Two of its original four divisions — research, and education and training — have been privatized. Research was privatized in 1997 as a wholly-owned subsidiary company, the Centre for Research on Islamic and Malay Affairs (RIMA). In 1999 the education and training division was privatized as MERCU Learning Point Pte Ltd. The AMP's headquarters has retained the corporate services and Al Hijrah divisions.

The AMP currently has a staff of over one hundred full-time and part-time paid employees, and several hundred more individuals who volunteer their services in particular capacities. The AMP childcare, educational, and training services are offered at a number of locations islandwide, including at various mosques, the AMP's headquarters in Haig Road, and the AMP's new commercial premises in Changi Road, which the company recently purchased for S$4.8 million.

The AMP Corporate Services division is the nerve centre of the organization, and it has four departments: finance, administration and human resources; corporate affairs; fund raising; and management information systems. As in any well-run Singaporean company, the Corporate Services division has bought into all manner of management enhancement courses offered through the Singapore Productivity and Standards Board (PSB), such as the Management Development Programme and the People Developer Standard Programme. In 1998, the AMP also began implementing Total Quality Management (TQM) throughout the organization. Thus, the AMP corporate culture subscribes to the basic orientation of the Singapore corporate culture, which is actively disseminated through Singapore government institutions, in particular, the PSB.

The Al Hijrah division is the social arm of the organization. Principal activities include counselling, helpline service, befrienders service, youth enrichment programmes, and marriage guidance courses. The division also runs training programmes for volunteers.

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In 1997, the AMP initiated Gerakan Al Hijrah (Al Hijrah Movement) to motivate the community to become more proactive in tackling social problems. The name signifies the decentralization of the division's services from its main centre in the east of Singapore to outlying neighbourhoods in the north and west of Singapore. As a direct result of government housing policies, which have placed a percentage cap on the ethnic mix in public housing, the Malay-Muslim community does not have a territorial centre.[5]

The privatization of the education and training division into MERCU is the AMP's most ambitious project to date. MERCU (which means pinnacle) will be the vehicle to implement the AMP's Second Wave Plan in Education, and the Training Plan (TP) 21 to prepare the Malay/Muslim community for the knowledge-based economy (KBE). MERCU will be able to make quick decisions, be flexible to adapt to change, and be able to implement more programmes to serve the community's needs. Prior to MERCU's privatization in April 1999, the education and training division ran a total of twenty-two programmes for about 5,730 participants per year, with a total annual budget of S$1.2 million. MERCU planned forty programmes, benefit about 10,000 individuals per year, and have a total budget of S$2.3 million in its first year of operation. [6]

MERCU's educational programmes are grouped on the AMP's website under "Pinnacle of Education" (*Mercu Pendidikan*). Mercu Pendidikan is promoted as "a plan to assist students to go beyond ten years of basic education and secure higher education or skills training at the universities, polytechnics and the ITE". The latest Ministry of Education initiatives are monitored, and the AMP's educational programmes are constantly being adapted and refined to Singapore's fluid educational policies. For example, new elements have recently been added "in tandem with the Education Ministry's new approach towards the 'Thinking School, Learning Nation'". According to Mr Ismail Ibrahim, Executive Director of AMP, "these include a good foundation in IT skills, the ability to process information and also, strong communication skills. We are looking at mental dexterity, creativity, and technical ability".

Likewise, MERCU's training activities are geared to "increase workers' competitiveness so that they remain gainfully employed and enjoy higher earning capacity". TP21 is the AMP's five-year plan to upgrade the skills of Malay-Muslim workers to increase their trainability and employability. In Singapore, "21" has become a code word for all manner of the 21st century agendas and five-year plans. All fall under the umbrella Singapore 21 Vision, launched by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in April 1999. "Singapore 21: Together, We Make The Difference" can be accessed at <http://www.gov.sg/singapore21>.

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The AMP set up RIMA because it considers research vital to propose new solutions to the community's problems and to produce guidelines to ensure that its aspirations are met. RIMA currently has a research programme, a consultancy service, a scholarship programme, a seminars programme, a publication programme, and a resource centre. The primary reason for privatizing RIMA was to create a more independent research facility which other Malay-Muslim community organizations could also tap into. The AMP is presently RIMA's principle client, although some research projects are currently under joint sponsorship.

Finally, there is the question of company financing. Although the AMP's budget is not published on the website, the AMP *Annual Report 1997–98* provides an overview of the finances of AMP "Inc". During financial year 1997–98, the AMP had an income of S$7,247,396, and an expenditure of S$5,826,765 — solid numbers by any company standards. Income and expenditure breakdowns are shown in Table 9.1.

Income is derived from three primary sources — government grants and subsidies, individual and corporate donations, and revenue generated

TABLE 9.1
AMP's Income and Expenditure Breakdown for FY 1997–98

INCOME	**$**
Donations	2,585,557
Government grant	1,705,706
CPF check-offs	224,629
School fees	502,901
Fund-raising and other income	1,494,150
Childcare centre services fees and subsidies	676,553
Government MCD grant	57,900
Total income	7,247,396

EXPENDITURE	**$**
Network of preschool	570,594
Lower primary programme	128,212
Upper primary programme	317,054
Social action programme	757,335
Early childhood and family edu. programme	145,299
Education enrichment programmes	472,893
Research	243,826
Childcare centres	642,795
Contributions for community projects	1,751,127
Fund-raising expenses	797,630
Total expenditure	5,826,765

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through training and educational courses. Expenditures support the network of activities and programmes, research, and, in keeping with the AMP's need to raise revenue, fund-raising expenses.

Courses are run on a cost recovery basis, but fees are kept to a minimum by looking for sponsors, matching grants available from government educational and training schemes and subsidies, and sharing costs with other Malay-Muslim organizations.

There is nothing generic about course offerings. They are geared to the specific needs of the Malay-Muslim community in Singapore. The vocabulary used in describing and promoting the various courses is a fascinating blend of English terms which have special meanings that they would often not be understood by those unfamiliar with the Singapore education and training system, spiced with a distinctive Malay flavour.

For example, EMAS (English, Maths, and Science) is an acronym for the core curriculum in Singapore primary and secondary schools. But "*emas*" in Malay also means "gold". The AMP offers EMAS courses at various levels from Primary 1 to Secondary 5, two times per week for two hours per session, at a cost of between S$70 and S$100 per month. SWAT (Speakers, Writers, Thinkers) courses target good students from the Express stream. Here the reference to the management term "SWAT analysis" is quite sophisticated. AMP offers SWAT courses twice a week for two hours, costing between S$70 and S$100 per month. In recognition of the importance of parents in student motivation, AMP offers PIL (Partners in Learning) for parents, consisting of four modules, costing S$100.

Believing that attitudes towards education are formed when children are very young (a belief shared by most other Singaporeans), the AMP operates two childcare centres situated in the Housing Development Board (HDB) heartlands (Yishun and Woodlands) in the northern part of Singapore. The centres offer a full-day programme for children between 18 months and 5 years old. The curriculum includes English, mother tongue, music and art, physical activities and computer appreciation. The fee is S$380 per month for the full day programme, but working mothers enjoy a subsidy of S$150 offered by the Ministry of Community Development (MCD), and further financial assistance for low-income families is available from the AMP and the National Council of Social Service (NCSS).

The AMP Training Centres offer management, computer, and language courses for workers, entrepreneurs, retirees, and housewives. Specialized technical training programmes target Malay workers who lack formal educational qualifications. For example, one of the four new courses

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introduced in July 1999 is called Workplace Skills Training (WST) — five months, two evenings a week. At the end of the course, the participant qualifies for the ITE Best 4 Certificate (equivalent to Primary 6). The WST course fee is S$290.

AMP, THE MALAY-MUSLIM COMMUNITY, AND THE STATE

The AMP's networking with other Malay-Muslim community groups is quite extensive, and is generally on a project basis when a common goal can best be achieved through a broader community initiative. For example, the AMP is currently co-operating with MENDAKI and MUIS (Islamic Religious Council of Singapore) in Project CERAH (Complete Retrenchment Assistance Scheme). The scheme was designed to assist Malay-Muslims who lost their jobs in the 1997–99 economic downturn. Participants are offered job referrals and career guidance; two-week intensive skills training; seminars on coping and managing with retrenchment; and the option to participate in other courses, such as vocational, office skills and IT training.

Another example is the recently announced (October 1999) tie-up between the Tabung Amal Aidilfitri Charity Fund (TAA) to provide training and development courses to some 2,400 needy families over the next three years, at a cost of S$750,000. The funds will come from the money raised by the TAA each year through its charity boxes and other donations during the Ramadhan period. The tie-up will see underprivileged families, who receive grants from the charity fund each year, being sent for training, development, and computer courses to improve their job prospects, as well as to help them overcome other social problems.

The AMP strives for a broad-based participation of individuals from the Malay-Muslim community. It actively recruits volunteers, and solicits funds from Malay-Muslims who can arrange to contribute to the organization on a monthly basis via GIRO. Such investments of time and money are given recognition — everyone is listed by name and thanked in the AMP *Annual Report 1997–98*.

The AMP networks with the private sector — basically through seeking corporate sponsorship for various activities. Private sector individuals are frequently recruited to contribute their expertise and advice with regard to the development and execution of the AMP's educational and training programmes.

The AMP also has a close networking relationship with relevant Singapore government institutions, such as the Ministry of Education, the

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Ministry of Community Development, and various schools, training institutes, like the PSB, and tertiary educational institutions. The AMP is an affiliate of the NCSS. Government support for the AMP is largely on a project basis. The AMP is also eligible for various government matching-fund schemes, and other sources of government funding.

The AMP is run for Malay-Muslims, by Malay-Muslims. But the vocabulary it uses to express its community vision subscribes to the state's vision for a Singaporean society. This explains why there is very little "Muslim" about the AMP website, which is in English. The word "Islam" is not mentioned once. There are no "religious" courses on offer. Even the AMP's use of the term " *hijrah*", is, interestingly, explained in rather secular terms: "*Hijrah* is an Arabic term which means to make a journey. The term is also associated with one's effort to improve his/her life. AMP adopts this term to highlight the importance of building a better future for Malay-Muslim families." Scrolling to language courses offered, there are some more surprises. One would expect courses in Malay, or perhaps even English or Arabic, but the one course on offer via the website is "Basic Conversational Mandarin" — which is billed as "giving non-Mandarin speaking participants an opportunity to communicate verbally using simple Mandarin sentences (24 hours; S$190 per participant)".

One obvious answer to this lack of an "Islamic" focus is that the AMP is a niche organization within the overall constellation of Malay-Muslim institutions in Singapore. There are a host of organizations that cater to specific aspects of Malay-Muslim cultural life — including courses in Arabic and religious knowledge. Another possible answer is that the AMP caters to an exclusively Muslim audience. Therefore, the religious world-view, value system, and motivational impetus upon which the organization is based, is simply taken for granted. Both answers serve to illustrate the power of the community. The world of the AMP website is a uniquely Singaporean Malay-Muslim world. The calendar of events, the activities, and the hyperlinks to other organizations are all vertical links within the community.

CONCLUSION

To return to the AMP's goals outlined earlier, it is clear that a great deal of emphasis is placed on the first four aspirations, to be: educationally excellent, economically dynamic, socially progressive, and culturally vibrant. These four goals fit well with the Singapore Government's national priorities. Government funding for the AMP's programmes, also channelled

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through MERCU and RIMA, is quite straightforward, and there is no problem for the AMP to justify its use of public funds to facilitate the uplifting of educational and training levels amongst Malay-Muslim community members. The AMP, as an example of civil society in Singapore, appears to be successfully negotiating the space between civil society and the state.

There is, however, one area of contested space which is still being actively negotiated. This contested space is linked to the AMP's fifth goal — to be politically influential. The role of civil society in political discourse in Singapore is currently under negotiation. The AMP raised this issue in an interview with Minister George Yeo, published in the January–April 1999 issue of *Karyawan*, the AMP's magazine for members.

> **AMP:** Do you think that it is necessary for groups like AMP to have the space for it to address issues and matters of concern, even those which have political overtones?
> **George Yeo:** I am not saying that AMP cannot touch on political issues but it should not have a political posture. It should not be a political party or a political group in disguise. However, in many areas of your interest, you will touch on political matters. This is inevitable.

In May 2000, the Singapore Parliament passed the Political Donations Bill, which bans foreign funding to political parties and political associations. Concerns were raised that this law might stifle the growth of civil society. Under the Bill, any organization is a political association so long as its objects or activities relate "wholly or mainly to politics" in Singapore. According to Home Affairs Minister Wong Kan Seng, political associations will be gazetted as such, and reasons will be provided for this classification.[7]

The Political Donations Bill has illustrated the fact that civil society organizations will continue to test the boundaries of the political arena — the space where civil society and the state co-exist. The AMP, for example, has consistently provided feedback, differing views, and alternative suggestions regarding various government policies. For example, it commented on the controversial amendment to the Administration of Muslim Law Act (AMLA). The AMP is also preparing a thoroughly researched document that will present its considerations and recommendations to make meritocracy work better for Singapore and Singaporeans. Second language education policies are of vital concern.

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Such initiatives are likely to continue, as the AMP fulfils its advocacy role, and moves towards its goal to be politically influential. Negotiating this space means moving from the comfort zone of elaborating and implementing national programmes at the community level, to providing inputs that aim to shape state policies.

Notes

1 Gillian Koh and Ooi Giok Ling, eds., *State–Society Relations in Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies and Oxford, 2000).
2 George Yeo, "Civic Society — between the family and the state", Inaugural NUSS Lecture, 20 June 1991, World Trade Centre Auditorium, Singapore.
3 George Yeo, "Civil Society in Singapore", interview published in *Karyawan*, January–April 1999: 12–14.
4 Ismail Ibrahim and Elinah Abdullah, "The Singapore Malay/Muslim Community: Civic Traditions in a Multiracial and Multicultural Society", in Koh and Ooi, op. cit.
5 Ooi Giok Ling, Sharon Siddique, and Soh Kay Cheng, eds., *The Management of Ethnic Relations in Public Housing Estates*(Singapore: Institute of Policy Studies, 1993).
6 *The Second Wave in Education: From Plateau to Pinnacle* (Singapore: AMP, 1999).
7 *Straits Times*, 23 May 2000.

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PART IV

TOWARDS A GLOBAL CIVIL SOCIETY
From Convergence to Common Agenda

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10

Potential Islamic Doctrinal Resources for the Establishment and Appreciation of the Modern Concept of Civil Society

Nurcholish Madjid

There are at least three reasons to see the relevance and, therefore, the legitimacy, of an attempt to look at Islamic teachings for the resources to establish and appreciate the idea of civil society in Southeast Asia. The first is historical, in the sense that there is every indication that Islam has brought the idea of civil society to the West, which then spread to all nations. The discussion about the Renaissance philosophy of man always brings about the role of a certain "Pico" (Giovanni Pico della Mirandola), with his famous and influential *Oratio de hominis dignitate* (*Oration on the Dignity of Man*) that he wrote in 1486. The second is sociological and demographic, that is, that Islam constitutes the largest religion in Southeast Asia, with adherents spread all over the region. And the third is the need for Muslims to rediscover their religious fundamental teachings and to see the possibility of the development of the teachings within the context of modernity.

In his *Oratio*, Pico asserted that humanity had been assigned no fixed character or limit by God but instead was free to seek its own level and create its own future. No dignity, not even divinity itself, was forbidden to human aspiration. In this work, Pico expresses a view of man that breaks radically with Greek and Christian tradition: what distinguishes man from the rest of creation is that he has been created without form and with the ability to make of himself what he will. Being without form or nature he is not constrained, fated, or determined to any particular destiny. Thus, he must choose what he will become. (In the words of the twentieth century existentialists, man is distinguished by the fact that for him existence

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precedes essence.) In this way man's distinctive characteristic becomes his freedom; he is free to make himself in the image of God or in the image of beasts.[1]

His father, Giovanni Francesco Pico, prince of the small territory of Mirandola, provided for his precocious child's thorough humanistic education at home. Pico then studied canon law at Bologna and Aristotelian philosophy at Padua, and visited Paris and Florence, where he learned Hebrew, Aramaic, and Arabic. At Florence he met Marsilio Ficino, a leading Renaissance Platonist philosopher. Introduced to the Hebrew Kabbala, Pico became the first Christian scholar to use Kabbalistic doctrine in support of Christian theology. In 1486, planning to defend 900 theses he had drawn from diverse Greek, Hebrew, Arabic, and Latin writers, he invited scholars from all of Europe to Rome for a public disputation. For the occasion he composed his celebrated *Oratio.* A papal commission, however, denounced thirteen of the theses as heretical, and the assembly was prohibited by Pope Innocent VIII. [2] It is of utmost interest that the most influential Renaissance philosopher of man, Pico della Mirandola, began his *Oratio* with an assertion as follows:

> I have read in the records of Arabians, reverend Fathers, that Abdala ('Abd-Allah) the Saracen, when questioned as to what on this stage of the world, as it were, could be seen most worthy of wonder, replied: "There is nothing to be seen more wonderful than man". In agreement with this opinion is the saying of Hermes Trismegistus: "A great miracle, Asclepius, is man". [3]

Any Muslim with some familiarity with the Qur'an would immediately know that what Abdala the Saracen referred to for his answer to the question is the assertion in the Holy Book that God has "indeed created man in the best of moulds (*taqwim*)". The complete translation of the whole short Qur'anic chapter reads as follows:

> In the name of God Most Gracious Most Merciful.
> 1. By the Fig and the Olive
> 2. And the Mount of Sinai
> 3. And this City of security
> 4. We have indeed created man in the best of moulds
> 5. Then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low
> 6. Except such as believe and do righteous deeds: for they shall have a reward unfailing.

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7. Then what can after this contradict thee; as to the Judgment (to come)?
8. Is not God the wisest of Judges? [4]

So much is this Divine assertion on the dignity of man for classical *ulama* (scholars) that they took all conceivable efforts to understand it further by way of interpretation and elaborate rendition of the verses. One of the famous among the classical *mufassirun* (expert interpreters) of the Qur'an is al-Qurtubi (Muhammad ibn Ahmad ibn Abi Bakr ibn Faraj al-Ansari al-Qurtubi, died 671 A.H.), in his famous book of *tafsir* (interpretation), *Al-Jami' li-Ahkam al-Qur'an,* gives an intricate exegesis to the verse 95:4 like this:

> "We have indeed created man"… and what is meant by "man" is Adam and his descendants, "in the best of moulds (*taqwim*)," that is, in his uprightness and his youth's upstanding, such is what most interpreters (of the Qur'an) say. Man is the best of all that exists, because God creates everything walks headlong with the face grovelling, but creates man upright, with the tongue to speak and hand and fingers to hold. Abu Bakr ibn Tahir says, man is adorned with intellect, able of obedience to order, finding right path through differentiation (between right and wrong), standing straight, reaching his food with his hand. Says Ibn al-'Arabi, "God does not create anything better than man, because God creates man alive, knowledgeable, empowered, volitional, speaking, listening, observing, contemplating, and wise. All of this is the quality of Lord the Transcendent, and thus some of the *ulama* explain." The description is in accordance with the saying, "God has created Adam upon His Image," that is, upon His qualities, such as that we indicated. Another tradition says that God creates Adam "upon the Image of the Beneficient". But whence for the Beneficient to have corporeal image?! Thus it means nothing but His qualities. Al-Mubarak ibn 'Abd-u 'l-Jabbar al-Azdi relates a story to us, saying that al-Qadi Abu 'l-Qasim 'Ali ibn Abu 'Ali al-Qadi al-Muhsin, from his father, telling him, "Isa ibn Musa al-Hashimi loves his wife so much, and one day he said to her, "You are divorced three times if you cannot be more beautiful than moon". She stood up and concealed herself from him, saying, "You have divorced me!", and he spent a

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> terrible night. When he woke up in the morning, he rushed to the house of the (Caliph Abu Ja'far) al-Mansur, telling his story, and showing his extreme grief to him. The Caliph summoned the lawyers asking them their *fatwa*. All those present say, "She has been indeed divorced", except one man among the followers of Abu Hanifah. The man was all silent. The Caliph asks him, "Why don't you speak?" He then recites, "In the name of God, the Beneficient, the Merciful. By the Fig and the Olive, and the Mount of Sinai, and this City of security, We have indeed created man in the best of moulds (*taqwim*). (95:1–4). O you, the Commander of the Believers, man is the best of all things, and nothing is better than him. Al-Mansur then said to Isa ibn Musa, "The truth is as what this man said. Now go and meet your wife". Abu Ja'far al-Mansur immediately sent someone to the woman, conveying that she should stay obedient and not defiant to her husband because he did not divorce her.
>
> The story demonstrates to you that man is the best of all God's creatures, inwardly and outwardly. Therefore the philosophers say that man is the *micro cosmos* (*al-alam al-saghir*, "small universe") because all of what is there in all creatures is scraped together in man. [5]

Abdullah Yusuf Ali, the most acclaimed modern authority in the interpretation of the Qur'an, construes that *taqwim* is:

> mould, symmetry, form, nature, and constitution. There is no fault in God's creation. To man God gave the purest and best nature, and man's duty is to preserve the pattern on which God has made him.[6]

And the purest and the best nature of man is what the Qur'an calls *fitrah* (primordial, pristine nature) which is the source of the human perennial wisdom (*al-hikmah al-khalidah*), because of God's own guarantee that it would never be changed or altered:

> So set thy purpose (O Mohammed) for religion as a man by nature upright (*hanif*) — the nature (*fitrah*) of Allah, in which He hath created man. There is no altering (the laws of) Allah's creation. That is the right religion, but most men know not. [7]

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The natural uprightness (*hanifiyah*) of man is that he is true to his *fitrah*, as, Yusuf Ali says, "the magnetic needle is true to the north". Therefore, "Those who have been privileged to receive the Truth should never hesitate or swerve but remain constant, as men who know". [8] Yusuf Ali says further:

> As turned out from the creative hand of God, man is innocent, pure, true, free, inclined to right and virtue, and endued with true understanding about his own position in the Universe and about God's goodness, wisdom, and power. That is his true nature, just as the nature of a lamb is to be gentle and of a horse is to be swift. But man is caught in the meshes of customs, superstitions, selfish desires, and false teaching. This may make him pugnacious, unclean, false, slavish, hankering after what is wrong or forbidden, and deflected from the love of his fellow-men and (from) the pure worship of the One True God. The problem before the Prophets is to cure this crookedness, and to restore human nature to what it should be under the Will of God.[9]

As for the "true religion" or "standard religion" (*al-din al-qayyim*), Yusuf Ali has the following to say:

> *Din Qaiyim* here includes the whole life, thoughts and desires of man. The "standard Religion", or the Straight Way is thus contrasted with the various human systems that conflict with each other and call themselves separate "religions" or "sects"… God's standard Religion is one, as God is One. [10]

The dignity of man began when God declared him His vicegerent on earth. And "by making him vicegerent, God exalted him in position even higher than the angels, for the angels had to make obeisance to him". [11] And "man's position as vicegerent also gives him will and discretion, and if he uses them wrongly he falls even lower than the beasts".[12] This reality is affirmed in the above-quoted chapter of the Qur'an, when it is said, "Then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low, except such as believe and do righteous deeds: for they shall have a reward unfailing".

Among the first quality that God bestows to man as His vicegerent is freedom. Adam and Eve, representing the whole humanity, were invited by God to enter Paradise (*al-Jannah*, "Garden"), with complete freedom, to enjoy all what is there available, as they wish:

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> O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the garden and eat of the bountiful things therein as (where and when) ye will but approach not this tree or ye run into harm and transgression. [13]

But then Adam and Eve overstepped God's limit by drawing near to the forbidden tree, the transgression that resulted in the fall of Adam and Eve from the Paradise in disgrace. This is to be followed by the first homicide committed by man when Cain (Qa'in, also known as Qabil) killed Abel (Habil), out of enviousness. On the basis of the incident, God then decrees,

> On that account: We ordained for the Children of Israel that if anyone slew a person unless it be for murder or for spreading mischief in the land it would be as if he slew the whole people; and if anyone saved a life it would be as if he saved the life of the whole people. Then although there came to them Our apostles with clear Signs yet even after that many of them continued to commit excesses in the land. [14]

Thus it is decreed that to:

> kill or seek to kill an individual because he represents an ideal is to kill all who uphold the ideal. On the other hand, to save an individual life in the same circumstances is to save a whole community. What could be stronger condemnation of individual assassination and revenge?[15]

It is therefore an interesting coincidence that Pico della Mirandola, as indicated above, also holds the same belief that man's distinctive characteristic, especially such as the Qur'anic outlook of man's status as Divine vicegerent, becomes the basis of his freedom, and that he is free to make himself in the image of God or in the image of beasts, "the lowest of the low" (*asfala safilin*). Related to this predication is the Qur'anic verse:

> Many are the *jins* and men We have made for Hell: They have hearts wherewith they understand not, eyes wherewith they see not, and ears wherewith they hear not. They are like cattle, nay more misguided: for they are heedless (of warning). [16]

The elevation of man's dignity is such a central theme in the teaching of the Holy Prophet that he made it the most important proposition in his

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Farewell Speech (*Khutbat al-Wada'*) in the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage (*Hijjat al-Wada'*) about two months before he passed away. The speech is narrated in a good number of authentic Hadiths. The Holy Prophet made the speech three or four times in the occasion, on different dates and in different places. He made the first speech on 7 Dzulhijjah, in the Holy Mosque of Mecca, after the noon prayer. The second speech was on 9 Dzulhijjah, at 'Arafat, during the*wuquf*. The third was on 10 Dzulhijjah, at Mina, and the fourth was on 11 or 12 Dzulhijjah, also at Mina. The speeches are almost identical in the theme and subject. In a Hadith related by the famous al-Bukhari, the Holy Prophet is reported to have said in the speech,

> "O people, what day is today?" All reply, "It is a sacred day." He says, "What land is this?" All reply, " It is sacred land." He says, "What month is this?" All reply, "It is sacred month." He says, "Therefore, your Life, your Property and your Honour are sacred upon you all, just as you are today in sacred day, in sacred land, and in sacred month." (The Holy Prophet repeats the point many times, and then he raises his head, saying), "O God, did I convey the message? O God, did I convey the message?" (Ibn 'Abbas — God be pleased with him and his father — says, "By Him in whose hand is my soul, the speech is surely his [Prophet's] last testament for his community"). (The Holy Prophet says further), "Let those who are present pass (the message) to those who are absent, and do not return as infidels after me, striking each other's necks." [17]

Following the speech at Arafat, after the noon prayer, the finalization of the religion of Islam was reached, declared in a Qur'anic verse revealed to the Holy Prophet, "This day have I perfected your religion for you, completed my favor upon you, and have chosen for you Islam as your religion".[18] Thus the speech, as indicated by Ibn 'Abbas, is indeed the culmination of the Holy Prophet's mission.

Just as the Holy Prophet insisted on the sacredness of " *life, property and honour*" (*al-dima' wa'l-amwal wa'l-a'rad*), now we find the echo of the principles in modern documents like the American Declaration of Independence,

> We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain

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> unalienable Rights, that among these are *Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness*.

And at the very end of the Declaration we read the expression with a phrase which is exactly the same as the Prophet's phrase "*al-dima' wa'l-amwal wa'l-a'rad*":

> And for the support of this Declaration, with a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other *our Lives, our Fortunes and our sacred Honour* .

Individual freedom can survive only under a system of law by which both the ruler and the ruled are obliged. Such a system of fundamental laws, whether written or embodied in tradition, is known as a constitution. The idea of a written constitution found effective expression for the first time in the Constitution of Medina, the document that the Holy Prophet made as treaty between the *Muhajirun* (the Muslim immigrants from Mecca), the *Ansar* (the Muslim natives of Yathrib), the Jews, and some other Arab tribes. (See the Appendix for the full translation of the text of the document.) The spirit of the document is the very spirit of *madinah*, "city", which is etymologically derived from the same root as the verb "*dana-yadinu*", meaning "to obey", just as religion is "*din*", meaning "the doctrine of obedience to God", which is also the meaning of "*islam*". Therefore, "*madinah*" conceptually means "a place where people live together in a settled community, obeying the rule of law", that is, "state", "polity" or "*civitae*", similar to its Hebrew cognate "*medinat*" (thus the official Hebrew name of the State of Israel, "*Medinat Yishrael*"[19]).

The Holy Prophet changed the name of his migration town Yathrib into Medina, alluding to the spirit of civilized community dwelling in a place, obeying the law, and honouring "social contracts" between the citizens. Such contracts should be considered to be of the same power and authority as the contracts or covenants between man and God in the sacred teachings. Thus the word "*madinah*" directly connotes the idea of the life pattern of "*al-hadarah*" — civilization — as a settled community rather than roaming the desert as nomads, the life pattern of "*al-badawah*" — "bedouinness". Related to this conception is the assertion in the Qur'an that among the practices of unbelief in God is disobeying the rule and breaking the law as indicated by the life pattern of the bedouins:

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> The Arabs of the desert are the worst in unbelief and hypocrisy and most fitted to be in ignorance of the command which God hath sent down to his apostle: but God is All-Knowing All-Wise.[20]

Therefore the religion of Islam with its Shariah demands its followers to sincerely adhere to the law, just as the ancient Israel were to strictly observe the Torah of Moses and the Talmud.

The idea of law-abiding citizenship and the respect for "contracts" (*al-'uqud*) such as rules made on the basis of mutual agreement among people through the true deliberation (*musyawarah*) is affirmed in the Holy Book in many places related to many occasions. One of them reads like this:

> Fulfil the covenant of God when ye have entered into it and break not your oaths after ye have confirmed them; indeed ye have made God your surety; for God knoweth all that ye do. [21]

Yusuf Ali, commenting on the verse, says that the general meaning of fulfilling the covenant of God is such that it includes also the meaning that "every oath taken, or covenant made, is a Covenant before God, and should be faithfully observed". The same principle is asserted in another place: "O ye who believe! fulfil (all) obligations …" [22] and,

> And call in remembrance the favour of God unto you and His Covenant which He ratified with you when ye said: "We hear and we obey": and fear God for God knoweth well the secrets of your hearts.[23]

Thus the Holy Prophet Mohammed laid down the foundation of the establishment of law-abiding citizenship in "Virtuous City" (*al-Madinat al-Fadilah*), a community of people that the moderns now would call, in Arabic, "*al-mujtama' al-madani*", an idea that resembles very much such a currently held idea of "civil society" or, more aptly, "civilized society" ("*al-mujtama' al-mutamadyin*"). The great achievement of the Holy Prophet's venture to establish a virtuous city can never be overstated. According to Robert N. Bellah, one of the authorities in modern sociology,

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> … There is no question but that under Mohammed, Arabian society made a remarkable leap forward in social complexity and political capacity. When the structure that took shape under the prophet was extended by the early caliphs to provide the organizing principle for a world empire, the result is something that for its time and place is remarkably modern. It is modern in the high degree of commitment, involvement, and participation expected from the rank-and-file members of the community. It is modern in the openness of its leadership positions to ability judged on universalistic grounds and symbolized in the attempt to institutionalize a non-hereditary top leadership. Even in the earliest times certain restraints operated to keep the community from wholly exemplifying these principles, but it did so closely enough to provide a better model for modern national community building than might be imagined. The effort of modern Muslims to depict the early community as a very type of equalitarian participant nationalism is by no means an unhistorical ideological fabrication.
>
> In a way the failure of the early community, the relapse into pre-Islamic principles of social organization, is an added proof of the modernity of the early experiment. *It was too modern to succeed*. The necessary social infrastructure did not yet exist to sustain it. [Emphasis added.] [24]

The failure of the early community, and the relapse into pre-Islamic principles of social organization — that Bellah indicated — occurred when, in 50 A.H., the Caliph Mu'awiyah decided to appoint his own son, Yazid, as his successor. The idea was categorically repudiated by the Medinese and the Meccans, as it was branded as the practice of Caesar of Rome and Khusro of Persia, forms of despotism that are against the authentic Sunna (tradition) of the Prophet and the rightly guided Caliphs. The Madinese and the Meccans upheld the doctrine that succession to a caliphate should be through election and then public validation (*bay'ah*) by all the rank-and-file members of the community.[25] The failure was then never corrected until today, to the extent that Muslims knew among themselves only genealogical dynasties, and did not know how to have leaders through election until the introduction of the idea of democracy with its universal suffrage.

The highly favourable recognition made by Bellah to the Holy Prophet's achievement should be read, in this modern age, in the context of what is

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implied in Max Dimont's assessment of the Western nations' attitude towards Islam and the Muslims:

> For seven centuries the magnificent Islamic civilization had illuminated the cultural scene of the world with its beauty and grandeur, its wit and valour, its reverence for learning and penchant for business — a busy civilization, though never too busy to pause and pay tribute to a stanza of poetry. Neglected by most Western scholars because of their narcissistic preoccupation with Greek and Roman Classicism, perhaps future writers with broader concepts of history will restore this vanished civilization to its rightful place in the museum of past civilizations.[26]

Such are the Islamic resources that would very much support the Muslims in understanding and establishing such modern ideas as human rights and, by direct implication, civil society. And, in the way of making a conclusion, we remind ourselves that in an increasingly interdependent and interpenetrating global community, any human rights and civil orientation that does not genuinely support the widest possible shaping and sharing of all values among all human beings is likely to provoke widespread scepticism. The last half of the twentieth century is replete with examples, especially as far as it concerns the relationship and the engagement of the Muslims with the Western world.

APPENDIX

The Treaty of Medina (also known as The Constitution of Medina)[27]

In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful.

This is a document from Mohammed the prophet [governing the relations] between the believers and Muslims of Quraysh and Yathrib, and those who followed them and joined them and laboured with them. They are one community (*ummah*) to the exclusion of all men.

The Quraysh of emigrants according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit within their number and shall redeem their prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

The Bani 'Auf, according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit they paid in heathenism; every section shall redeem its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

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The Bani Sa'idah, according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit they paid in heathenism; every section shall redeem its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

The Bani al-Harith, according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit they paid in heathenism; every section shall redeem its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

The Bani Jusham, according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit they paid in heathenism; every section shall redeem its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

The Bani al-Najjar, according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit they paid in heathenism; every section shall redeem its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

The Bani 'Amr ibn 'Auf , according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit they paid in heathenism; every section shall redeem its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

The Bani al-Nabit, according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit they paid in heathenism; every section shall redeem its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

The Bani al-Aus, according to their present custom shall pay the bloodwit they paid in heathenism; every section shall redeem its prisoners with the kindness and justice common among believers.

Believers shall not leave anyone destitute among them by not paying his redemption money or bloodwit in kindness.

A believer shall not take as an ally the freedman of another Muslim against him.

The God-fearing believers shall be against the rebellious or him who seeks to spread injustice, or sin or enmity, or corruption between believers; the hand of every man shall be against him even if he be a son of one of them.

A believer shall not slay a believer for the sake of an unbeliever, nor shall he aid an unbeliever against a believer.

God's protection is one, the least of them may give protection to a stranger on their behalf.

Believers are friends one to the other to the exclusion of outsiders.

To the Jew who follows us belong help and equality. He shall not be wronged nor shall his enemies be aided.

The peace of believers is indivisible. No separate peace shall be made when believers are fighting in the way of God. Conditions must be fair and equitable to all.

In every foray a rider must take another behind him.

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The believers must avenge the blood of one another shed in the way of God.

The God-fearing believers enjoy the best and most upright guidance.

No polytheist shall take the property of person of Quraysh under his protection nor shall he intervene against a believer.

Whosoever is convicted of killing a believer without good reason shall be subject to retaliation unless the next of kin is satisfied (with blood money), and the believers shall be against him as one man, and they are bound to take action against him.

It shall not be lawful to a believer who holds by what is in this document and believes in God and the last day to help an evil-doer or to shelter him.

The curse of God and His anger on the day of resurrection will be upon him if he does, and neither repentance nor ransom will be received from him.

Whenever you differ about a matter it must be referred to God and to Mohammed.

The Jews shall contribute to the cost of war so long as they are fighting alongside the believers.

The Jews of the Bani ‘Auf are one community with the believers, the Jews have their religion and Muslims have theirs, their freedmen and their persons except those who behave unjustly and sinfully, for they hurt but themselves and their families.

The same applies to the Jews of the Bani al-Najjar,
the same applies to the Jews of the Bani al-Harith,
the same applies to the Jews of the Bani Sa‘idah,
the same applies to the Jews of the Bani Jusham,
the same applies to the Jews of the Bani al-Aus,
the same applies to the Jews of the Bani Tha‘laba,
except those who behave unjustly and sinfully, for they hurt but themselves and their families.

And the Jafna, a clan of the Tha‘laba, are as themselves.

The same applies to the Jews of the Bani al-Shutayba.

Loyalty is a protection against treachery.

The freedmen of Tha‘laba are as themselves.

The close friends of the Jews are as themselves.

None of them shall go out to war save with the permission of Mohammed, but he shall not be prevented from taking revenge for a wound.

He who slays a man without warning slays himself and his household, unless it be one who has wronged him, for God will accept that.

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The Jews must bear their expenses and the Muslims their expenses.

Each must help the other against anyone who attacks the people of this document.

They must seek mutual advice and consultation, and loyalty is a protection against treachery.

A man is not liable for his ally's misdeeds.

The wronged must be helped.

The Jews must pay with the believers so long as war lasts.

Yathrib shall be sanctuary for the people of this document.

A stranger under protection shall be as his host doing no harm and committing no crime.

A woman shall only be given protection with the consent of her family.

If any dispute or controversy likely to cause trouble should arise it must be referred to God and to Mohammed the apostle of God.

God accepts what is nearest to piety and goodness in this document.

Quraysh and their helpers shall not be given protection.

The contracting parties are bound to help one another against any attack on Yathrib.

If they are called to make peace and maintain it they must do so; and if they make a similar demand on the Muslims it must be carried out except in the case of a holy war. Every one shall have his portion from the side to which he belongs.

The Jews of al-Aus, their freedmen and themselves have the same standing with the people of this document in pure loyalty from the people of this document.

Loyalty is a protection against treachery: He who acquires aught acquires it for himself.

God accepts what is nearest to piety and goodness in this document.

This document will not protect the unjust and the sinner.

The man who goes forth to fight and the man who stays at home in the city is safe unless he has been unjust and sinned.

God is the protector for the good and God-fearing man, and Mohammed is the apostle of God.

Notes

[1] See *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1994–1998, s.v. "Giovanni Pico della Mirandola", *Britannica* CD 98.

[2] Ibid.

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[3] Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, *Oration on the Dignity of Man*, translated by Elizabeth Livermore Forbes, Ernst Cassirer et al., in *The Renaissance Philosophy of Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 223.
[4] Qur'an, sura al-Tin, Chapter 95: verse 1–8.
[5] Tafsir al-Qurtubi, CD-Rom *Al-Qur'an*, Sakhr, Cairo, ver. 6.5, 1993–97.
[6] A. Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur'an, Translation and Commentary* (Jeddah: Dar al-Qiblah, 1403 A.H.), note 6199.
[7] Qur'an, sura al-Rum, Chapter 30: verse 30, translation by Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, *The Meaning of the Glorious Koran* .
[8] A. Yusuf Ali, op. cit., note 3540.
[9] Ibid., note 3541.
[10] Ibid., note 3542.
[11] See the Qur'an, sura al-Baqarah, Chapter 2: verse 30–34.
[12] A. Yusuf Ali, op. cit., note 3542.
[13] Qur'an, sura al-Baqarah, Chapter 2: verse 35.
[14] Qur'an, sura al-Ma'idah, Chapter 5: verse 32.
[15] A. Yusuf Ali, op. cit., note 737.
[16] Qur'an, sura al-A'raf, Chapter 7: verse 179.
[17] Hadith, by al-Bukhari (*Mawsu'at al-Hadith al-Sharif* , CD-Rom Computer Program, Cairo, Sakhr, version 1, 2, 1995).
[18] Qur'an, sura al-Ma'idah, Chapter 5: verse 3.
[19] See *Britannica*, s.v. "Israel".
[20] Qur'an, sura al-Tawbah, Chapter 9: verse 97.
[21] Qur'an, sura al-Nahl, Chapter 16: verse 91.
[22] Qur'an, sura al-Ma'idah, Chapter 5: verse 1.
[23] Qur'an, sura al-Ma'idah, Chapter 5: verse 7.
[24] Robert N. Bellah, ed., *Beyond Belief* (New York: Harper & Row, paperback edition, 1976), pp. 150–51.
[25] As for the repudiation by the Madinese of Mu'awiyah's decision, see Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti, *Tarikh al-Khulafa'*, Beirut, Dar al-Kutub, 1408/1988, p. 156.
[26] Max I. Dimont, *The Indestructible Jews* (New York: New American Library, 1973), p. 209.
[27] Quoted, with some modifications, from A. Guillaume, *The Life of Muhammad: A translation of Ibn Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah* (Karachi: Oxford University Press, 1980), pp. 231–33.

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11

Inter-Civilizational Dialogue
Theory and Practice in Islam

Osman Bakar

INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of this paper is to provide a brief discussion of some of the fundamental and salient elements in the Islamic theory and practice of inter-civilizational dialogue. The domain of ideas with which inter-civilizational dialogue is primarily concerned constitutes a new field of academic inquiry. Scholarly interest in dialogues between civilizations found a new impetus with the publication of Samuel Huntington's controversial thesis "The Clash of Civilizations". [1] Following worldwide debates on the thesis, there has certainly been an increasing realization in many circles that the best way to bring about peaceful coexistence among the world's civilizations, and thus to avert clashes between them, would be to promote inter-civilizational dialogues.

In the Muslim world itself, there are hopeful signs that dialogues between civilizations will feature more prominently in its intellectual agenda. A number of centres dedicated to the pursuit of civilizational dialogues have been established in such countries as Malaysia, Jordan, and Iran. Major international conferences and seminars have been organized during the last few years on the general theme of dialogues between civilizations. Significantly, a broad cross-section of the local Muslim community — representatives of various professional groups, members of governmental and non-governmental organizations, and politicians from both the ruling and opposition parties — had participated in these programmes with much enthusiasm, thus signifying their openness towards other cultures and civilizations.

The strong support given by political leaders to these inter-civilizational dialogue ventures has proved to be especially important in ensuring their initial successes. In Malaysia, which has given birth to perhaps the Muslim world's first international centre for dialogues between civilizations, [2] we

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have to acknowledge the instrumental role played by Anwar Ibrahim, a former Deputy Prime Minister, in promoting dialogue activities at both national and international levels. [3] In Iran, President Seyed Mohamed Khatami has now emerged as a strong advocate of inter-civilizational dialogue. Himself a thinker who has written and delivered insightful speeches on the subject, Khatami has been active in persuading the international community to include "dialogue among contemporary civilizations" in its agenda. On his initiative that received the backing of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC), the United Nations General Assembly at its fifty-third session passed, on 13 November 1998, a resolution designating 2001 as "the year of the dialogue of civilizations". Following the UN resolution, Tehran hosted from 3–5 May 1999 the Islamic Symposium on Dialogue Among Civilizations, that was attended by delegates from OIC member states.

From the point of view of the progress of contemporary Muslim thought on inter-civilizational dialogue, the Tehran Symposium did produce an important document entitled "Tehran Declaration on Dialogue among Civilizations".[4] The document may be described as a statement of Muslim nations' perspective on dialogue between contemporary civilizations. Not only does it seek to present the Muslim view of the general principles of this dialogue, but also to define the kind of international relations that ought to be pursued by all nations, as well as the methodology, mechanisms, and financing of the dialogue.

Notwithstanding this encouraging development in the Muslim appreciation of inter-civilizational dialogue, contemporary Muslim thought on the subject may be viewed as being still in its infancy or in the formative stage of its foundation. An Islamic philosophy or Islamic theories of inter-civilizational dialogue are yet to be formulated and articulated in a comprehensive manner.[5] Dialogue as a living and a thriving culture, and not merely as occasional events, will only take firm roots in society if it is based on a solid theoretical and institutional foundation. With this view in mind, and in our humble attempt to contribute towards the realization of this important goal, this chapter discusses certain Qur'anic ideas and prophetic practices that have a direct bearing on the issue of an Islamic theory of inter-civilizational dialogue.

WHAT IS INTER-CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE?

Inter-civilizational dialogue is defined here as meaning "a conversation between different civilizations on fundamental and vital issues that confront contemporary man, as well as on perennial issues which arise from the

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very nature of man and his existence, both individual and societal or collective". The issues addressed in this kind of dialogue are regarded as fundamental in the sense that they concern the necessary things in human life and pertain to the basis of civilized living. They are also fundamental in the sense that they concern human problems that are not unique to any particular society but are rather global in nature.

These fundamental and vital issues of human civilization with which we are concerned in inter-civilizational dialogue are described as contemporary in nature or as pertaining to contemporary man (modern or post-modern) in the sense that they were absent from pre-modern civilizations and they are unique to our own times. But of equal, if not even more, importance are the perennial issues which have engaged the thinking minds of human beings from time immemorial, regardless of the level of sophistication of their social organization and the level of technological progress they have achieved. Further, the debated issues, whether contemporary or perennial, are considered to be of such vital importance to the well-being of human society and civilization, and the future of humankind that, if they are left unresolved, they can lead society to degenerate to a sub-human level and will bring about the destruction of the natural environment.

Let us take the example of environmental and ecological problems in contemporary civilization. The issues of ecological crisis and destruction of the natural environment are no longer the exclusive concern of the post-industrial West but are now also confronting the industrializing east and south, which are bent on following the same path to development. They are global issues, but are unique to our contemporary civilizations. Pre-modern man had never experienced the same kind of environmental and ecological problems that modern man has been facing. Humankind of all ages has, of course, been familiar with various kinds of natural disasters. But it is only during the modern period, thanks to rapid progress in technological development, that humankind has witnessed the massive destruction of the natural environment at its own hands.

The traditional role of religion is supposed to provide man with the wisdom and inner strength he ever needs in his role as the protector of the natural environment from man-made destruction. But given the marginalized role of religion in public life in modern society, no country has escaped the devastating impact of development on the environment. Whether a country is predominantly inhabited and ruled by Christians or Muslims, by Hindus or Buddhists, it has not shown the way to development and technological progress that is in harmony with the natural environment.

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Environmental and ecological issues are indeed vital to humankind in the sense we have just defined. Our contemporary environmental crisis has already resulted in a devastating impact on human life. Too many people have suffered from the numerous effects of pollution such as on their health and their sources of livelihood. There is also untold destruction of other forms of life in nature, which are so vital to the continued preservation of our delicate ecological balance. There is now a worldwide realization that at stake is not only the future of our natural environment, but even that of planet Earth. The present ecological and environmental crisis must therefore be counted among the major civilizational issues that need to be addressed in inter-civilizational dialogues. [6]

It is heartening to note that today the global debate on environmental and ecological issues are no longer confined to their scientific, technological, and political aspects. Of late, there is an increasing interest on the religious and spiritual dimensions of the issues. Inter-religious or inter-cultural discourses on environment have become quite common. This spiritual significance of nature and the environment to man is beginning to catch the imagination of many people. Insofar as religion is the most fundamental objective element that defines civilization, what this new development in debates and discourses on environment means to all of us is that inter-civilizational dialogues on the subject in the true sense of the word are beginning to find their proper place on the intellectual scene of our contemporary world. Now that the environmental and ecological crisis is being discussed in all its aspects and dimensions, we may categorically assert that the issue has not only been globalized but also universalized.

Besides the environmental and ecological crisis, there are numerous other vital contemporary issues that need immediate solutions from the world community. One of these issues is the misuse and misapplication of science and technology, such as in the production of nuclear and chemical weapons. Another is the issue of parental mistreatment of children and other forms of domestic violence, including spouse-battering, which are now threatening the institution of traditional family itself. Yet another issue is the drug problems of youths. Human rights issues have also come to dominate our contemporary international agendas. We can go on and on enumerating contemporary issues that need to the debated, discussed, and resolved in inter-civilizational dialogues.

As far as perennial issues are concerned, there are also many of them that need to be taken up and treated seriously at our inter-civilizational dialogues. At the personal level, examples of such issues are man's quest for inner peace, the meaning of being human, man's relationship with

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God, and every person's paramount life-long need to achieve a harmonious balance between individual rights and responsibilities. At the level of community, society, or nation, there are the issues of religious tolerance, rights of religious minorities, and war and peace between tribes, kingdoms, and states.

THE NECESSITY OF INTER-CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE

Inter-civilizational dialogues are necessary because different civilizations usually have different, and quite often also contradictory, philosophical standpoints on the various issues to which we have alluded. They also adopt different approaches to the solutions to many of those problems. The fact is that humankind has always lived in a multi-civilizational, multi-religious, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural world. And it is through inter-civilizational dialogues that people of different civilizations can understand each other better, similarities between civilizations be reaffirmed and strengthened, and differences between them be respected. It is also through inter-civilizational dialogues that we may find urgent solutions to many of the contemporary problems of the world. Inter-civilizational dialogue is indeed the alternative to the "Huntingtonian clash of civilizations".

As far as Islam is concerned, it has always taken a positive view of inter-civilizational dialogue from the very beginning of its existence as a religion and as a civilization. This chapter provides a brief general discussion of Islamic theory and practice of inter-civilizational dialogue.

DOES ISLAM BELIEVE IN PLURALISM?

Belief in dialogue is inseparable from belief in pluralism. A particular civilization's general attitudes towards dialogue are influenced and shaped by numerous factors, but the most important of these is perhaps the kind of beliefs it holds on pluralism. If that civilization believes in pluralism — ethnic, religious, or cultural — within as well as beyond its cultural borders, then it will strive to uphold the virtues of dialogue. For it is through dialogues that it will come to terms better with the reality of a pluralistic world and the challenges it poses. As far as Islam is concerned, it is very clear from numerous assertions in the Qur'an that this religion strongly believes in pluralism in our world human society.

There are many people in the West today, and also in the East, who believe that Islam is incompatible with pluralism. This unfortunate belief has been largely reinforced by the negative western media coverage of the

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modern phenomena of Islam, especially that phenomenon conveniently identified and popularly labelled in the West as "Islamic fundamentalism". Islam is often portrayed in the media as a religion that is basically intolerant of views contrary to its own. But it is not just the media that has been painting the religion as anti-pluralism. Islam's traditional position on pluralism has also suffered distortions through the negative sweeping generalizations certain western academics have made about Islam in their writings that are supposed to be scholarly. Huntington's depiction of contemporary Islam as a civilization that has "bloody borders" with practically every one of its neighbours is one case in point and it has often been quoted. One would have expected to see a far more objective treatment of Islam from a scholar like him than what is usually to be found in the mainstream media.

Since there has been so much ignorance about Islamic views on pluralism, it is necessary to highlight here some of the most important teachings of the religion on the subject. The first fundamental fact about human pluralism that the Qur'an seeks to impress upon man is that our world is by nature multi-ethnic, multi-racial, and multi-lingual. Says the Qur'an:

> O humankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that you may know each other (not that you may despise each other). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of God is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And God has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things) (Chapter 49: verse 13).

This verse has several important implications. First, humankind has a common origin. We are all descendants from the first human couple, identified in the Abrahamic religious tradition as Adam and Eve. Our common human origin means that we should always be mindful of our status as members of a single human family. It also means that we should always believe in the universal ideal of the unity of humankind and human brotherhood. The state of affairs and the practical conduct of the human family may be far removed from the ideal, but the Qur'an's teaching on the ideal is very clear. It wants humankind to give a lasting commitment to that ideal. It enjoins on Muslims not only to believe in the unity and brotherhood of fellow Muslims but also in the unity and brotherhood of all human beings. Further, it is in conformity with the Qur'an's universal outlook that, in appealing to the ideal, it is not just addressing the Muslims but the whole of humankind.

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The second implication is that the evolution of humankind into many different tribes, races, and nations is not due to pure chance. It is not the product of a natural process that is devoid of purposes of cosmic proportion and significance. On the contrary, the Qur'an maintains that there is a definite purpose to this diversity and pluralism in the ethnic composition of humankind. This purpose constitutes an integral component of the divine universal plan. There is an inherent wisdom in the natural division of humankind into so many ethnic groups. Its immediate purpose is so that man may know one another.

The Qur'anic idea of "mutual acquaintance and understanding" between people of different ethnic groups is to be understood at various levels of knowledge, from knowledge of physical characteristics to knowledge of psychological traits, and from knowledge of manners and customs to knowledge of the higher aspects of culture and civilization. This means that, in the Qur'anic perspective, inter-cultural and inter-civilizational dialogues are very much encouraged. Such dialogues can serve as a very useful instrument for achieving the goal of "mutual acquaintance and understanding" that we have in mind. We may even claim that dialogue is the best method of realizing this Qur'anic goal. Our mutual acquaintance and understanding, if progressively pursued, will lead us to a better appreciation of our similarities and differences as well as to a better appreciation of the oneness of the human family. The higher purpose of ethnic diversity and pluralism is so that all ethnic and racial groups will come to recognize and acknowledge their common humanity. Only then can there be human solidarity and human brotherhood on earth. But the ultimate purpose of ethnic pluralism is so that man will acknowledge its reality as one of the many signs of divine wisdom in creation. From the Qur'anic point of view, in making that acknowledgement, man has succeeded in attaining the highest level of knowledge possible, which is spiritual in nature.

The third implication of the verse concerns the meaning of human dignity. As strongly emphasized in the verse, the best person in the sight of God is the best person in moral conduct. In the final analysis, what matters most is the moral and spiritual worth of the human individual. The real worth of a person does not reside in his social status, his blood and colour, his race or ethnicity, his wealth, and not his creed even. The divine criteria of judging the quality of human beings are spiritual in nature and also the most objective and the most universal, since these transcend subjective and sectarian considerations. This conception of human dignity means that in our world of ethnic pluralism, the correct approach to inter-

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cultural and inter-civilizational understanding and to the unity of humankind is based on spiritual principles. Inter-civilizational dialogues must therefore incorporate spiritual elements, otherwise these dialogues will lack depth and seriousness which are so essential to their success and lasting impact.

The second fundamental fact about human pluralism stressed by the Qur'an concerns the multi-religious character of our world.[7] Again, it is in conformity with the divine universal plan that we have religious pluralism in our world. Muslims have a positive view of inter-religious dialogues, because their consciousness of religious pluralism is rooted in the very fundamental beliefs of Islam. The Qur'an's teachings on religious pluralism are being emphasized in many of its verses. One verse states as follows:

> To thee (O Mohammed) We sent the Scripture in truth, confirming the scripture that came before it, and guarding it in safety. So judge between them by what God has revealed, and follow not their vain desires, diverging from the truth that has come to thee. To each among you, We have prescribed a set of rules of practical conduct and a spiritual way. If God has so willed, He would have made you a single community, but (His Plan is) to test you in what He has given you: So strive as in a race in all virtues. The goal of you all is God. It is He that will show you the truth of the matters in which you dispute. [8]

Religious diversity and pluralism in human society is thus recognized in the Qur'an as a social fact and as a permanent "reality" in the global human community. Muslims are called upon to accept this reality and to confront it in a practically realistic manner in accordance with the divine guide in that book. No religion should dream of converting the entire world to its belief system. As emphasized by the verse just cited, it is not God's plan to make us human beings a single religious community. Rather than harbouring the illusion that one day the whole world will embrace their religion, Muslims should instead try to comprehend the meaning and significance of the existence of other religions and strive to learn the art of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and fruitful interaction among followers of different religious beliefs.

In adopting this position, it doesn't mean that Muslims have to cease carrying out religious missionary activities. Muslims can be tolerant of other religions and yet believing passionately in the truth and sanctity of their own religion. This is a constant major theme in their holy book. And by all means, save through compulsion, they should invite others to

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become their co-religionists. The Qur'an has something to say even on the art of invitation. The best kind of invitation is described in the book as an invitation that is based on "wisdom and beautiful discourse". [9] Whatever arguments and pleadings are being used in the course of the invitation must be nothing less than "the best and gracious". This Qur'anic spirit of invitation to the Islamic faith is very much in conformity with the idea of respect for human dignity, which the teachings of Islam seek to impress upon the Muslim mind.

Guided by the Qur'anic injunction "there is no compulsion in religion",[10] Muslims are duty-bound to respect the beliefs of those who on their own free will do not wish to live within the fold of Muslim brotherhood. Respect for human dignity is a universal principle that is to be applied to all individuals, regardless of whether they are fellow Muslims or non-believers in Islam. The Prophet's practical observance of this important principle throughout his life is well known.

Genuine respect has to be grounded on solid principles. One of the main principles enunciated in the Qur'an is simple and clear: God is one but the paths to God are many. This principle is the source and a fundamental basis of religious pluralism and diversity in the world. The Qur'an has attributed diversity and pluralism in the world's religious creeds ultimately to God Himself. It is He who has "prescribed a set of rules of practical conduct and spiritual way" to every nation and religious community. In the light of this inclusivistic spirit *vis-à-vis* other religions that the Qur'an is apparently seeking to inculcate in the global human community, Muslims and likewise people of other creeds are enjoined to learn three fundamental things in the art of peaceful coexistence among religions. These are:

(1) Each community should remain faithful to the tenets of its own religion, because God wanted "to test you in what He has given you".
(2) The different religions should strive as in a race in all virtues. Each religion in its own way seeks to enjoin its followers to do good and to practice virtues. It would be a good thing for the world community if religions see themselves as being in a healthy competition with each other in pursuing virtues in human societies.
(3) In trying to live with other religions, each religion should respect differences that set themselves apart. They are discouraged to pass value judgment on other creeds because in the hereafter God will show us "the truth of the matters in which you dispute".

In laying down the fundamental principles of peaceful coexistence among religions, the Qur'an has helped us to enrich our wisdom on the

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virtues of inter-civilizational dialogue. The Qur'an's contribution to universal ideas on inter-civilizational dialogue does not lie in merely affirming that the religiously pluralistic character of our world is something that has been divinely ordained, but more importantly in defining the range of fundamental issues that need to be addressed in such a dialogue.

The verse just explained may be the most pertinent to our discussion of the Islamic meaning of religious pluralism and Islam's views on the fundamental prerequisites of inter-religious harmony. But there are several related ideas, which throw further light on Islam's attitude towards religious pluralism. These ideas are to be found in numerous verses and some of these are worth mentioning here. One is the Muslim belief in the divine origin of the world's religious scriptures. Closely related to this idea is the belief that God has sent prophets and divine messengers to all nations at different times in history, each speaking in "the language of his folk". The Qur'an strongly believes in the universal idea of divine revelation, mercy, and salvation. Divine mercy and salvation embrace peoples of all nations. In accepting these ideas, Muslims have very good reasons to be interested in the teachings of other religions, especially as contained in their holy books. They may not be in total agreement with the contents of these non-Muslim scriptures. But what is important is the fact that, in principle, they do believe that ultimately their origin is divine. That belief alone is the source of many positive values for inter-religious dialogue. It has the potential to create an intellectual and spiritual space that will admit inter-religious understanding and mutual religious tolerance.

PROPHETIC PRECEDENTS IN INTER-CIVILIZATIONAL DIALOGUE

Muslims in every age have looked upon the Prophet as the perfect human personification of Qur'anic ideals. According to traditional Muslim sources, it was the Prophet himself who claimed that what best portrayed the form and substance of his moral character was the Qur'an. If we are looking for prophetic precedents in the Muslim practices of inter-religious and inter-civilizational dialogues, then the implication of this traditional claim is quite clear. To the extent that the Qur'an has got something to say about inter-civilizational dialogue, those Qur'anic teachings have found their first practical expressions in Muslim society at various points of time in the Prophet's life. The relevant verses provide an accurate picture of the Prophet's philosophical attitudes towards such a kind of dialogue, as well as his consistent commitment to these dialogues throughout his prophetic

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career. And conversely, the principles of dialogue for which the Prophet stood, the approach to dialogue he has adopted, and the whole spirit of his participation has been solely inspired and guided by the Qur'an.

The Prophet had often been engaged in serious and intimate dialogues with Christian and Jewish leaders on issues that are now the concern of inter-civilizational dialogue. For example, the Prophet had received a Christian delegation from Najran in his Medina mosque and held discussion there with them on theological issues that were of a common concern to Christian and Muslim faiths. In general, the scope of dialogues he had conducted with representatives of "People of the Book" had apparently covered theological questions and other matters pertaining to the spiritual domain as well as political and cultural matters such as those pertaining to the rights and responsibilities of the various communities in the newly born Muslim state. The Prophet's positive attitudes towards dialogue as reflected in his teachings and practices were emulated by his political successors, especially the early caliphs, and later generations of Muslim rulers. It has also been quite instructive for successive generations of Muslims that in the long war between the Roman Empire and the Persian Empire both the Prophet and his Quraysh enemies have taken sides, as also alluded to by the Qur'an.[11] The Prophet and his companion have sided with Rome, and his enemies with Persia. It may be inferred from this episode that Islam has a greater "civilizational affinity" with the Roman civilization than with Persian civilization.

CONCLUSION

For the sake of progress in contemporary inter-civilizational dialogue, it is imperative that serious studies be carried out on the encounter between Islam and other world civilizations. When Islamic civilization expanded rapidly in a matter of a few centuries of its existence to embrace lands in both the East and the West, Muslims then appeared to have undertaken a wide range of dialogue activities with various non-Muslim communities. While this interesting domain of Muslim achievement remains to be explored, the Qur'an's own position on inter-civilizational dialogue needs a more refined and articulate study by contemporary scholars. In our effort to formulate an Islamic theory of inter-civilizational dialogue, the Qur'an remains without doubt the best source of ideas on this subject.

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Notes

[1] Huntington's thesis first appeared in an article entitled "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993): 22–49. This article was subsequently expanded into a book bearing the title *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).

[2] Known as Centre for Civilizational Dialogue, it was established in 1995 at the University of Malaya following a highly successful international seminar on "Islam and Confucianism: A CivilizationalDialogue" which the University had organized. I was directly responsible for establishing the Centre and administering it until 1997 when its first Director, Dr Chandra Muzaffar, was appointed. Enjoying the strong support and highly visible patronage of Anwar Ibrahim, the country's charismatic then Deputy Prime Minister, the Centre has been able to organize a series of international seminars on civilizational dialogue, in which the world's leading scholars in the field, including Huntington, have participated. Proceedings of these seminars have been partly published under the Centre's name. See, for example, Osman Bakar and Cheng Gek Nai, eds., *Islam and Confucianism: A Civilizational Dialogue* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1997); Osman Bakar, *Islam and Civilizational Dialogue: The Quest for a Truly Universal Civilization* (Kuala Lumpur: University of Malaya Press, 1997). Apart from organizing seminars, conferences, and workshops, the Centre is also running a Master's degree programme in civilizational studies, perhaps the first of its kind in the world. This postgraduate programme has been popular with students of all races, and it has attracted graduates in all kinds of disciplines.

[3] One of Anwar Ibrahim's important contributions towards the development of inter-civilizational dialogue in contemporary Muslim thought was in promoting dialogues between Islam and Confucianism. The 1995 Islam–Confucianism Dialogue seminar has been widely acknowledged as a major event in the history of race relations in Malaysia, particularly between Muslim Malays and Confucian Chinese who constitute the country's two biggest ethnic groups. In venturing into a public discussion of religious and other "civilizational" issues that have hitherto been excluded from the domain of public discourse, the seminar has broken new ground and created new opportunities in ethnic relations and inter-cultural understanding. Local Chinese newspapers have been opening up their space more frequently than ever for a lively discussion of issues pertaining to Islam–Confucianism

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relations. Anwar's keynote address at the official opening of the seminar, which deliberates, among others, on the common core social and political values of Islam and Confucianism, has been published as a chapter in Bakar and Cheng, op. cit. For his other relevant writings, see *The Need for Civilizational Dialogue*, Occasional Paper Series (Washington, D.C.: Centre for Muslim–Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, 1995); and *The Asian Renaissance* (Singapore and Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International, 1996).

[4] The Declaration was published in full in the magazine of the OIC, *al-Mootamar* 4 (1999): 6.

[5] Certain prerequisites have to be fulfilled before we can formulate a comprehensive theory of inter-civilizational dialogue that would meet the needs and challenges of the twenty-first century. These include comparative studies of world civilizations and the study of contemporary Islamic civilization both in light of its past history and in relation to modern and contemporary Western civilization. The subject of religious pluralism, which has so much bearing on the issue of inter-civilizational dialogue, also needs to be explored in greater detail.

[6] The first book to have treated the environmental crisis as a "civilizational issue" in the real sense of the word was Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *The Encounter of Man and Nature: The Spiritual Crisis of Modern Man* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1967). Long before it became fashionable to talk about the environment, the book had then predicted the imminent destruction of the environment, a prediction that has come true as attested by the numerous ugly manifestations of the environmental crisis that has enveloped the entire globe over the last few decades. The main significance of the book for contemporary inter-civilizational dialogue lies in the fact that after having thoroughly investigated the spiritual and intellectual roots of the environmental crisis, it goes on to offer a solution to this modern civilizational problem by persuading humankind to take heed of the spiritual and philosophical teachings of the world's civilizations on the harmony of man and nature.

[7] For an introductory discussion on religious pluralism from the Qur'anic point of view, see Abdulaziz Sachedina, *The Qur'an on Religious Pluralism*, Occasional Paper Series (Washington, D.C.: Centre for Muslim–Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, 1999).

[8] *The Qur'an*, Chapter 5: Verse 51. (Abdullah Yusuf Ali's translation)

[9] Chapter 16: verse 125.

[10] Chapter 2: verse 256.

[11] See *The Qur'an*, Chapter 30 entitled Rome.

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12

Islam and Civil Society in Southeast Asia
A Review

Omar Farouk Bajunid

The theme of Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia deserves much more attention than it has been so far given. The unique position of Islam in the region, by and large, still appears little explored and, at best, only ambivalently understood. Although Islam is a dominant religion in Southeast Asia and Muslims are to be found in practically every country in the region, it has not been thoroughly examined. There are obviously still many unanswered questions about civil society in Southeast Asia and how it relates to Islam as a dominant religion in the region. This chapter constitutes a modest attempt to explore the above theme. The chapter begins with a brief profile of Islam and Muslim society in Southeast Asia. The current discourse on civil society and its relevance to Islam is then reviewed. Subsequently, the chapter examines the phenomenon of civil society in Southeast Asia. In the final part, the chapter assesses the future prospects for Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia.

ISLAM AND MUSLIM SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

On account of a range of historical, geographical, social, educational, intellectual, cultural, demographic, economic, and political reasons, Islam has occupied a very special place in Southeast Asia for a long time. Historically, Islam has ancient roots in the region. Geographically, Southeast Asia has one of the largest concentrations of Muslim population in the world. Indonesia, Malaysia, and Brunei are Muslim majority countries, while Muslim minorities exist in significant numbers in the rest of Southeast Asia. There are around 5 million Muslims in the Philippines, between 3 to

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4 million in Thailand, about another 3 million in Myanmar, approximately 600,000 in Singapore, and at least half a million in Cambodia. In terms of numbers alone, even as minorities they are, no doubt, a highly visible group. In all, Muslims constitute approximately 40 per cent of the total population of the region and naturally emerge as a vital element within it. In Indonesia alone, which is the world's fourth most populous country, Muslims make up almost 90 per cent of the country's estimated 210 million people.

Perhaps what makes the Muslims in Southeast Asia particularly unique is that they maintain interlocking and overlapping relationships with the other communities in all kinds of settings. The Muslims in Southeast Asia are not just defined by their religious identity but they could also, at one and the same time, cherish other equally potent forms of ethnic identity. The Muslims may be either Bajau, Samal, Maguindanao, Sundanese, Javanese, Makassarese, Kachin, Burman, Haw Chinese, Thai, Malay, Cham, Khmer, or any one of the hundreds of ethnic groups that exist in the region but over and above that, they are also, at the same time, either Indonesians, Malaysians, Filipinos, Thais, Cambodians, Vietnamese, Singaporeans, Laotian, Myanmarese, or Bruneians, depending on where they come from. Likewise, they also invariably share other kinds of identity with their non-Muslim counterparts as social workers, farmers, fishermen, factory hands, entrepreneurs, civil servants, labourers, unionists, club members, and so on. The Muslims are distinguished from the non-Muslims, vertically, by their Islamic faith but this form of distinction does not signify total segregation because in many other ways, horizontally, the Muslims maintain overlapping ties with the non-Muslims, making them appear almost indistinguishable from each other in many respects. This is the pragmatic nature both of Muslim society in Southeast Asia as well as the wider polities they belong to that need to be*a priori* understood. Islam in Southeast Asia needs to be understood in the multi-ethnic and multi-religious context in which it is situated.

The reality of Islamic presence in Southeast Asia today is too overwhelming to be ignored. This is manifested not only by negative events like the hostage-taking crisis by the Abu Sayyaf radical rebel faction in Southern Philippines, mounting separatist insurgency led by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Mindanao, and the bloody sectarian violence between Muslims and Christians in the Moluccan islands in Eastern Indonesia but also, by the growing influence and enhanced public profile Islam has acquired throughout the region. Political Islam too is now much visible in many parts of Southeast Asia. And perhaps more importantly, Muslims have begun to assert a more prominent role in the

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region. An Islamic cleric, Abdurrahman Wahid, who is also the patron of the world's biggest Muslim religious organization, Nahdlatul Ulama, is now the President of Indonesia. Symbolically at least, although Indonesia does not declare itself an Islamic state, Islam is now represented at the highest level of the executive in the world's fourth largest nation. Leading Muslim personalities occupy important posts in Abdurrahman Wahid's cabinet. The chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly or the Majelis Permesyuaratan Rakyat (MPR), Amien Rais, is also another committed Islamist. Muslim political parties have now re-emerged in the Indonesian political arena to undertake the political mobilization of the Indonesian public using Islamic symbols, ideas, and rhetoric. Traditional Muslim organizations have found a new relevance and Muslim pressure groups and civil society movements operating under the banner of Islam have also mushroomed in the new climate of greater political openness in Indonesia. The recent democratic transformation in Indonesia has apparently helped restore the pre-eminence of political Islam in contemporary Indonesian affairs. There is no doubt that the Muslim constituency is now recognized as a crucial factor in the new Indonesian politics.

In Malaysia, which is distinctively multi-ethnic and multi-religious, although the Muslims make up slightly over half of the country's population, constitutionally, Islam is regarded as the official religion. As a consequence of this, the public profile of Islam is much in evidence. Likewise, the position of political Islam, which has always been important in the country's system of parliamentary democracy, has also been strengthened further following the impressive electoral performance of the Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party or Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (PAS), in the country's most recent general election held in 1999. Now, not only is the federal government of Malaysia, which is made up of fourteen different political parties led by a Muslim political party, United Malays National Organization (UMNO), but even the opposition front in parliament is now headed by an Islamic political party, PAS. At least two state governments in Malaysia, namely, Kelantan and Terengganu, are also in the hands of the opposition Islamic party. Electoral co-operation between the parties of the ruling Coalition Front and those involving the Opposition Front is now achieved with a Muslim party assuming the lead role. Resurgent Islam is dominant in Malaysia although, by and large, it is peaceful and non-confrontational. There is also evidence of the desire to co-operate with the non-Muslims to achieve common humanitarian principles and goals. In the case of Brunei, Islam is upheld as the state religion and is considered to be one of the defining features of the sultanate, along with Malayness and the monarchy. Its public visibility is pervasive.

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The visible role of Islam is not just confined to the Muslim-majority states of Southeast Asia but also extends to non-Muslim polities. In Thailand, which is a predominantly Buddhist polity, with the consolidation of parliamentary democracy in the 1990s the Muslims have assumed an unprecedented degree of public visibility. There are, in the present Parliament (1995–2000), fourteen Muslim parliamentarians and several Muslim senators. The present President of the Thai National Assembly who is also the Speaker of Parliament, Wan Muhammad Noor Matha, is a Muslim. The current Foreign Minister of Thailand, Dr Surin Pitsuwan, who is currently the most senior Foreign Minister in ASEAN, is also a Muslim. In the Thai senatorial election held in March 2000, it was a Muslim candidate in Bangkok who secured one of the highest number of votes. Muslim lawmakers in the Thai parliament and senate play an important role in the modern governance of the kingdom. The Muslims are represented in almost all political parties although traditionally they have always been associated with the Democrat Party, one of Thailand's oldest. The degree of religious and political freedom that the Muslims enjoy in Thailand today is also without precedent in recent Thai history. They are now officially allowed to use or to revert to Muslim names. Muslim women have been granted the right to wear the *hijab* in government educational institutions and in public service. Muslim prayer rooms (*musalla*) have been set aside in strategic public places, including the Don Muang International Airport, the Hualumpong Railway station, and even inside the Parliament building, to cater to the religious needs of the Muslims. Even universities now allow Muslims to organize the weekly Friday prayers within campus. Three things could be deduced from the above. Firstly, the Muslims as a minority have no major problems relating to the non-Muslims, mostly Buddhists in this case, in what is essentially a Buddhist majority state. Tribute must also be given to Thai society as a whole for being tolerant and accommodating. Secondly, it was the advent of liberal democracy and political openness that had created the conducive climate for Muslims along with other Thai citizens to locate their positive role within the Thai polity. And, finally, although the rise to high office of a number of Muslims has nothing to do with Islam directly, the fact that this has taken place at all, clearly, at the very least, demonstrates the compatibility between Islam and modern political ideas and roles.

Like in Thailand, in Cambodia too, although historically the Muslims have been an integral part of the Cambodian polity, it was only after the re-introduction of parliamentary democracy in the kingdom in the post-UNTAC (United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia) period that

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they have been able to re-assert a distinct political role. Several Muslim leaders, representing parties across the political spectrum, were appointed to ministerial positions after the 1993 general election. In the subsequent 1998 general election, the position of the Muslims became consolidated further. The Muslims now have two senators each representing the Funcinpec (National United Front for an Independent, Neutral, Peaceful, and Co-operative Cambodia) and the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and there are ten Muslim Members of Parliament, namely, five from the CPP, four from Funcinpec, and one, representing the Sam Rainsy Party (SRP). In the 1998 election too, there was also a political party, called Salvation for Women, which was founded and headed by a Muslim lady. Presently, one of the two Deputy Prime Ministers, Tol Lah, who is also the secretary-general of Funcinpec, one of the parties in the present coalition government of Cambodia, is a Muslim. It is important to note, however, that it is the newly-reconstructed political system in Cambodia that had created ample opportunities for Muslims to assert their legitimate political role, not just to represent Muslim interests but more so the wider interests of the nation through their respective political affiliations.

In the case of Singapore too which also practices parliamentary democracy, Muslim political representation has been achieved through political parties, especially the ruling People's Action Party (PAP). The Muslims in Singapore are a sizeable group. They have always been represented in the Singapore parliament and government since independence. But Muslim parliamentarians do not necessarily represent the exclusive interests of the Muslims because, like their non-Muslim counterparts, they owe their direct loyalty to the party over other things. Such representation, if any, is invariably indirect and sometimes incidental. The political space for the Muslims to assert their collective interest is very limited in Singapore. This is also partly a function of the generally restrictive political climate in the city-state. Notwithstanding this, for the Muslims as a whole, it is not the nature or level of their political participation in mainstream politics that distinguishes them from the other Muslims in the region, but rather it is the creative and positive way in which they have been able to organize their religious community life in a cosmopolitan and modern environment, with all its constraints and difficulties, using their own financial and human resources and managerial skills. In terms of their organizational skills they could easily be used as models for other Muslims seeking a way to balance religious life in a modern environment.

In the Philippines, although the country is overwhelmingly Catholic, an Islamic leadership, under Governor Nur Misuari, now leads the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao. The visibility of Islam in the public sector

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in the Philippines has been significantly enhanced especially in the southern provinces. In Myanmar too, which is also essentially multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and multi-religious, the role of Islam is not insignificant. The numerical size of the Muslims, their geographical spread, and relatively higher socio-economic position compared to the others make them an important minority group whose role cannot be overlooked. The military regime in Myanmar, which rejects the idea of participatory politics, has, however, denied the Muslims the avenue to assume a more visible political role, thus, in effect diminishing their public profile. Likewise, in Vietnam and Laos, which are essentially communist states with a one-party system, Muslim minorities have to adopt a very low public profile and live within the limitations of the communist system.

It is also useful to note that the growing significance of Islam in Southeast Asia is not just due to history or geography alone or any single contributing factor but is also a function of the growing importance of the region itself. Thus, as the region is geographically large, strategically situated, populous, rich in natural and human resources, economically vibrant, and fairly stable politically, the Muslims who make up a significant portion of the population of the region naturally emerge as some of its main beneficiaries. But just as the region is diverse, the Muslims too are far from homogeneous. The Muslims are not only distinguishable from the non-Muslims in their respective countries but also have differences among themselves. The irreducible criterion that they possess as Muslims is adherence to Islam or *tauhid*ic unity, or unity fostered by common core beliefs, but beyond that there could be any number of differences even between them. They may be divided by different national identities, ethnic affiliations, languages, socio-economic statuses, cultures, and different schools of Islamic religious thoughts.

Wherever they are, one very important feature of the Muslims in Southeast Asia, is their very high level of adaptability to the different political, cultural, and social systems that they come into contact with. In this sense, it would not at all be helpful to just view Muslims as a neatly compartmentalized, insulated, or exclusive group, who are unconnected to the rest of the polity, because in actual fact, as observed above, they live and operate in overlapping contexts, as inhabitants of the region, as citizens of their respective nations, as members of the different political parties, as members of professional bodies and voluntary associations, and as local community members maintaining overlapping identities but in an atmosphere of mutual tolerance with the others. The Muslims in Southeast Asia, like their non-Muslim counterparts are not unaffected by developments

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that take place in their countries. Where they are different, is that they tend to continually fall back on Islamic teachings for renewed spiritual, intellectual, cultural, and social guidance, and inspiration. The existence of a transnational Islamic network in its various forms, on the other hand, helps to sustain this process giving it a unique character. Therefore, in an important sense, perhaps more than their national counterparts, Southeast Asian Muslims tend to look beyond national frontiers for fraternity, friendship, lessons, assistance, and connection. The *ummah*, in the minds of the Muslims in Southeast Asia, though is still very much an ideal, is a practical and living concept. The resurgence of Islam in all of Southeast Asia needs to be seen in this light. Likewise, on a wider scale, the phenomenon of the global Islamic resurgence has also helped reinvigorate Islam and Muslim societies in Southeast Asia. It is in this context that Islamic ideas and institutions, have been revived in the region helping to reinforce the commitment of the Muslims to Islam.

The moral, spiritual, intellectual, and civilizational resources that Islam commands have also helped the Muslims to become a dynamic community. The strength of Islam appears to lie in the fact that, although it is basically concerned with the immediate well-being of its own constituency, it also seeks to address wider humanitarian concerns and is prepared to work with other religious communities to promote common values which uphold human dignity, civility, and decency. It is, however, important to note that the role of Islam in Southeast Asia has also been dependent on contextual factors, which have nothing to do with the religion itself. With the possible exceptions of Brunei where Islam is used to legitimize the polity and Malaysia where it is regarded as an official religion, in the Philippines, Thailand, Cambodia, and Indonesia it was only after the most recent wave of democratization that Islam appears to have been able to re-claim its dislocated space and function. In fact, it is in these countries, rather than Brunei or Malaysia, where the role of Islam appears to be more creative and dynamic. Whatever the case, evidently, the evolving political role of the Muslims in the Southeast Asian region has to be seen in the context of the political developments taking place within each and every country in the region itself. To understand Islam in the region we will have to understand the peculiar contexts of each nation in which Islam has to operate. Whether the full potential of Islam can be positively harnessed or otherwise seems to depend not only on the Muslims themselves but also how the different states in the region respond to the growing demands of their people, Muslims and non-Muslims alike, for a tangible stake and a rightful place in their respective polities.

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THE CIVIL SOCIETY DISCOURSE

Civil society has become a common catchphrase all over the world. As a concept it seems to have evolved over time, acquiring in the process, various meanings and interpretations. Its current revival, however, is generally attributed to recent political developments in Eastern Europe, Latin America, and East Asia. In the same vein, its rise is also widely seen as a response to the collapse of the house of European communism. Essentially, perhaps partly because of its overly liberal usage, and partly, its varied definitions and inherent ambivalence, the concept of civil society seems to connote different things to different people and societies. But what really is civil society? According to the Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan:

> Non-governmental organizations are the clearest manifestation of what is referred to as "civil society", that is, the sphere in which social movements organize themselves around objectives, constituencies and thematic interests. These movements include specific groups such as women, youth, and indigenous people. Other actors have also taken on an increasingly important role in shaping national and international agendas. They include local authorities, mass media, business and industry, professional associations, religious and cultural organizations, and the intellectual and research communities.[1]

The Secretary-General also attributes the emergence or the re-emergence of civil society in some cases:

> to two interlocking processes: the quest for a more democratic, transparent, accountable and enabling governance and the increasing preponderance of market-based approaches to national and global economic management, which have resulted in redefining the role of the State and vested new and broader responsibilities in market and civil society actors in the pursuit of growth and well-being. In this overall context, a vibrant civil society is critical to processes of democratization and empowerment.[2]

Evidently, in the Secretary-General's framework, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) represent civil society but he also seems to imply that there exists a connection between political openness, democracy,

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good governance, and civil society, thereby underlining its political connotation. In other words, civil society is an NGO with a covert or overt political agenda no matter how narrow that agenda is. The Secretary-General, in all likelihood is just observing and reporting a reality as seen from the United Nations rather than trying to define what civil society should be.

Kumar too, admits the political nature of the concept of civil society when he states that society exists:

> in the economy and the polity; in the area between the family and the state, or the individual and the state; in the non-state institutions which organize and educate citizens for political participation; even as an expression of the whole civilising mission of modern society.[3]

Haynes, on the other hand, argues that:

> civil society is linked to, but separate from, political society. The former comprises civil institutions not directly involved in the business of government or in overt political management. They are not political parties either. Yet this does not prevent civil society from exercising profound political influence, on matters ranging from single issues to national constitutions. [4]

He further suggests that civil society is embedded in the conception of free associations of individuals, independent of the state, self-organizing in an array of autonomous and politically significant activities, which is a *de facto* description of Western civil societies. The political dimension is obviously significant in his definition of civil society. Diamond offers a slightly varied approach arguing that civil society is "the realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-regulating, (largely self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules", which implies that it could either be political or non-political.[5] He, however, insists that it has to be of pluralistic market-oriented nature. But Diamond too apparently does not dismiss the political perspective of civil society.

Gellner, in a compelling work, entitled *Conditions of Liberty: Civil Society and its Rivals*,[6] expounds his elaborate views on civil society. He suggests that although the simplest immediate and intuitively obvious good definition of civil society is that it:

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> is that set of diverse non-governmental institutions which is strong enough to counterbalance the state and, while not preventing the state from fulfilling its role of keeper of the peace and arbitrator between major interests, can nevertheless prevent it from dominating and atomizing the rest of society, … it is still gravely deficient because such a notion of civil society would include many forms of social order which are unacceptable in the Western liberal tradition. (ibid., pp. 5–6)

For Gellner, civil society is not just an organization or a movement but something, which represents a total order and reflects a way of thinking. He makes a distinction between the notion of civil society used in a broad sense and that used in a narrower sense arguing that:

> What distinguishes Civil Society (using the term to describe the entire society), or a society containing Civil Society (in the narrower sense), from others is that it is not clear who is boss. Civil Society can check and oppose the state. It is not supine before it. According to its most influential critic, Karl Marx, it is actually Civil Society which is boss, and the power of the state, or even its independence, is mere façade, a sham. This is the broader sense of Civil Society: it refers to a total society within which the non-political institutions are not dominated by the political ones, and do not stifle individuals either. (ibid., p. 193)

It is on account of his very passionate view of what civil society is and what it is not that he concludes that the notion of an amoral complete civil society, which advocates modularity and individualism, is fundamentally incompatible with Islam. Gellner contends that whereas civil society requires the privatization of religious belief, Islam is unsecularizable. He is critical of Islam in this respect arguing that:

> The scripturalism, pervasive rule orientation and puritanism, the regulation though not sacralization of economic life, the monotheism, restrained ritualism and religious though not political individualism, have somehow produced a world religion, which, at any rate so far, is secularization-resistant, and tends increasingly to dominate the polities which it has a majority. (ibid., p. 199)

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For him Islam is an example of a social order which lacks the capacity to provide political countervailing institutions or associations, which is atomized without much individualism. Islam also appears to lack intellectual pluralism (ibid., p. 29).

It is evident that the concept of civil society which Gellner advances is strongly rooted in the Western intellectual tradition. It goes beyond the functional and emphasizes the normative. For Gellner, the notion of civil society is a "new ideal or counter-vision" which underlines the idea of institutional and ideological pluralism, which prevents the establishment of monopoly of power and truth, and counterbalances those central institutions which, though necessary, might otherwise acquire such monopoly (ibid., pp. 3–4). His view is obviously ideological. It is an ideology that is strongly rooted in the desire to limit the role of government while expanding the role of private citizens and voluntary groups and associations. This is where it appears inconceivable for him, that Islam, with its own complete ideology, humanistic and ethical system, and an independent moral order would be able to come to terms with the Western approach which advocates detachment and total freedom as well as voluntary rather than ascribed identity. His thesis, of course, has been criticized by many scholars as being flawed and bias. Elsewhere in this particular volume, Chaiwat has also made a legitimate case against Gellner's views. It is not just Gellner's views that have been challenged but also the general Western framework which is heavily normative emphasizing Western values such as individual freedom, secularism, legalism, Western intellectualism, and political activism. For our immediate purpose, however, it is useful to take note of the broad points raised in Gellner's work and his provocative conclusion.

Interestingly, while on the one hand scholars like Gellner take the view that Islam is not compatible with civil society, many modern Muslim thinkers, on the other hand, generally appear supportive of the idea of civil society. The only difference is that they would be quick to advance their own understanding of civil society based on the Islamic perspective. Paradoxically, this attitude tends to give some credence to Gellner's arguments about the fundamental divide between the Western approach and the Islamic attitude. The Muslims will only accept their own understanding of civil society, not necessarily that which is advocated by the West. The Muslim attitude towards civil society seems to be a qualified one. But perhaps for Muslim scholars that is where the moral strength of Islam lies. Islam will sanction whatever is good and constructive so long as the position of Islam is not compromised, especially in respect of *tauhid*

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and its unchanging tenets of morality, and whatever is perceived to be bad will be rejected. The Islamic approach departs from this premise.

Muslim scholars also tend to jealously safeguard their right to give their own interpretation of civil society. For example, Syed Naguib Alatas maintains that the Islamic concept of civil society rooted in the term *din* or religion is not only different but also far superior to the Western approximation of the idea. [7] He considers the Western notion of civil society flawed and inadequate. Anwar Ibrahim, another influential Muslim leader, in a lecture delivered at the Istiqlal Mosque in Jakarta in 1995, offered his own Islam-centric version of civil society considering it as a productive social system which is founded on the moral principle which balances individual freedom with societal stability. [8] This view clearly challenges Gellner's amoral criterion. Chandra Muzaffar also acknowledges the distinction between the Islamic concept and the Western notion but does not see the two as necessarily irreconcilable. [9] Osman Bakar too has attempted to trace and highlight the Islamic perspective on civil society underlining its own unique tradition. [10] Saliha Dato Hassan Adli has also pointed out that the Islamic version and the Western notion are different.[11]

Evidently, the Islamic concept of civil society is inseparably linked to the Islamic religion. On the other hand, the Western notion of civil society as advocated by Gellner is very much rooted in the Western intellectual tradition. In a sense, the Islamic position appears to be a reaction to the Western model by falling back on Islam's own rich tradition. Apparently, the holism and comprehensivism of Islam appear to be at odds with the particularism and pluralism that Western civil society claims to espouse. Although Gellner concedes that there exists a dichotomy between High Islam and Low Islam, he continues to remain obsessed with the cohesiveness of the Muslim *ummah*, a factor in his calculation that makes the Western notion of civil society an unlikely candidate for Islam. But where Gellner errs is his lack of appreciation that Islam also operates in all kinds of contexts and should not only be considered as being relevant to Muslim majority countries or situations alone because, as Chaiwat has tried to argue, the position of Muslim minorities too must also be taken into consideration in the overall discourse on Islam and civil society. Although the realm of *tauhid* (the unity of core beliefs), or vertical Islam, is uncompromisable, in the area of *muammalat* (social relations) or in horizontal Islam, pluralism in all kind of practical contexts, is sanctioned by Islam. Thus, Islam will have no problems at all accepting the role of NGOs provided their aims are to pursue the common good and do not trespass on the *tauhidi*c aspects of Islam. The flexible, dynamic, and

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accommodating character of Islam is always there. What is needed is a proper approach to bring this out. Sadik J. Al-Azam has aptly argued that:

> Islam, as a coherent static ideal of eternal and permanently valid principles, is, of course, compatible with nothing other than itself … . But Islam as a living dynamic evolving faith, responding to widely differing environments and rapidly shifting historical circumstances, incontrovertibly proved itself highly compatible with all the major types of polities and varied forms of social and economic organization that human history produced and threw up in the lives of people and societies: from kingship to republic, from slavery to freedom, from tribe to empire, from ancient city state to modern nation-state. [12]

Ilkay Sunar, writing in the same volume, also entertains this flexible viewpoint and rejects Gellner's claims. [13]

In the final analysis it is important to recognize, at least, two things, namely, that being a holistic and comprehensive religion that it claims to be, Islam is entitled to have its own ideal of a civil society which may be related to but is still fundamentally distinct from the Western notion of civil society, and that secondly, while this is so, Islam can also easily accommodate the role of civil society as understood in the West, especially when the goals of the common good are established and they do not interfere with questions of belief. In addition to this, it should also be realised that any attempt to evaluate the relationship between Islam and civil society must take into account the peculiarities of every context, as the role of Islam in a particular environment is also invariably a function of the particular political, cultural, or social system in which it exists. A more liberal and inclusive approach would help us better understand the relationship between Islam and civil society at this point of time.

CIVIL SOCIETY IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Civil society is today a reality in Southeast Asia. Since the early 1990s it has developed in an unprecedented manner. The present state of civil society in Southeast Asia is probably best reflected in Yamamoto's edited work entitled *Emerging Civil Society in the Asia Pacific Community* [14] which documents results of a survey on the indigenous development of civil society in each nation in Asia. Civil society is defined here to include NGOs, independent research organizations, and organized philanthropy.

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Not all countries of Southeast Asia, however, are represented in the study and not all civil society movements are covered. Nevertheless, to my knowledge, this constitutes the most recent systematic attempt to evaluate the role of civil society in the region. It is impressive in its endeavour and contribution. A summary of the main conclusions of the study is given below.

There is a noticeable increase in the growth of NGOs in the region. For example, in Indonesia, the number of NGOs now ranges from 4,000 to 6,000. In Thailand, there were 8,408 general non-profit associations and 2,966 foundations registered with the National Cultural Commission. In the Philippines, up to 1999 there are 14,398 NGOs and People's Organizations. In Singapore, the list of registered societies in April 1994 totalled 4,562. The pattern elsewhere is the same. Most NGOs began as traditional/religious/welfare organizations and later moved into developmental and other issue-related areas. There is also a trend towards national networking among the NGOs. In the Philippines, networks, coalitions, caucuses, federations, and other associations that seek to rationalize the NGO community have been established. In Malaysia, the Environmental Protection Society of Malaysia (EPSM) is now the founding co-ordinator of the Malaysian Environmental and Conservation Network. In Indonesia, Wahana Lingkungan Hidup (WALHI) serves as a network of concerned environmental NGOs. In Singapore, in 1991, the Society Against Family Violence (SAVE) was registered as an umbrella body dealing with family violence. The growth of civil society is a by-product of rapid economic development and the emergence of a middle class in the countries of the region. The renewed relevance of NGOs in the region is in response to the pluralistic socio-economic needs of the people as a consequence of inequitable development. There is a growing recognition by governments in the region of the important role of NGOs and the need to co-operate with them. The development of NGOs has also been stimulated by the international NGO movement, supported by international organizations such as UNHCR, UNICEF, UNESCO, UNIFEM, WHO, and UNFPA (ibid., pp. 5–15).

The foregoing summary provides us with a fairly accurate picture of the development of civil society in Southeast Asia today. The overall study itself is indeed commendable as a pioneering work. It is rich in information and contains useful analytical insights on the state of civil society in the Asia Pacific region that encompasses Southeast Asia. Its value should be acknowledged. It is, however, not without limitations. For one thing, it is essentially a preliminary work. For another, not all the countries of Southeast

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Asia are represented in the study, which adopts a much wider geographical scope. There is no coverage at all on the situation in Brunei, Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia. The experiences of the countries of East Asia, not to mention Australia and New Zealand, appear very different from those of Southeast Asia and also each other. There are no indigenous funding organizations on the scale that exist in Japan or Australia, for example. Similarly, not all NGOs are incorporated in it. The focus of the study is also selective. It also tends to be descriptive in nature preferring to evaluate NGOs at the formal or external level. There is also very little treatment of the role of Muslim NGOs or the discourse on Islam and civil society.

In a more recent work entitled *The Prospects for Civil Society in Southeast Asia*, published in 1997, Rodan explores some of the difficult issues surrounding civil society in Southeast Asia. He argues that the industrialization taking place in Southeast Asia will not necessarily lead to the formation of expansive civil societies and liberal democracies although that remains one possibility (Rodan 1997, p. 4). He notes that:

> Contrary to the positive connotations commonly attached to civil society, groups that exist outside the state have divergent values and agendas, not all of which are marked by political tolerance or liberal democratic aspirations. Indeed, some forces within civil society hold to blatantly elitist and antidemocratic values. (ibid., p. 4)

Rodan also takes the view that it is not capitalist revolutions that will create civil society but rather the results of the complex social transformations taking place in the region. The increasingly numerous and differentiated middle class, which encompasses a range of professionals, public and private bureaucrats, and the self-employed, the development of business classes, and the expansion of wage labour constitute part of this dimension (ibid., p. 17). He claims that the governments in Southeast Asia resort to co-option and to using cultural nationalism, for example, in the "Asian values" argument to weaken civil society. He concludes that unless a liberal civil society is established major sections of society would remain politically marginalized (ibid., p. 25).

Rodan's work shows a good understanding of the general situation in Southeast Asia but he is short on specifics. Conceptually he also seems clear but like Gellner, Rodan appears to be a staunch advocate of the Western liberal version of civil society. He concedes that there is some

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form of civil society in Southeast Asia at present but it is far from perfect and desirable. Apart from citing the "Asian values" perspective he makes no reference to the Islamic idea of civil society. Although Al-Arqam, the civil society movement which has been banned in Malaysia, is quoted by him, it is not done in a positive light. The Islamic perspective on civil society in Southeast Asia is grossly missing in Rodan's analysis just as it is conspicuously absent from Yamamoto's study. This will become even more evident if we look at the other chapters in this volume written by Muslim scholars who seem to believe that Muslim NGOs too are legitimate components of civil society. They do not at all seem to doubt the compatibility between Islam and civil society, as they understand it, although this has been on the whole, rather inadequately treated in their own chapters. But what seems distinctive about their approach is the deliberate attempt to incorporate Islamic idioms and ideas in their discussions.

There is also considerable variety in their treatment of Muslim civil society. Chaiwat's attempt to profile the case of the Ban Krua Muslims as a civil society movement is useful, informative, and instructive. The article demonstrates how, with ingenuity, the Muslims in the Ban Krua area in metropolitan Bangkok, successfully organize themselves, using Islamic symbols and Thai popular sentiments to publicize their grievance in a peaceful and non-confrontational manner. But it would be misleading not to acknowledge that the success of the Ban Krua civil action has also been assisted by other factors. It was the most recent wave of democratization in Thailand that occurred in the 1990s, accompanied by political openness, liberalism, inclusivism, benevolence, sense of fair-play, and, above all, "humanizing" tendencies that created the right climate for the Ban Krua civil action to be effective. The role of the Muslims as exemplified by the Ban Krua protest movement will no doubt help enrich Thai civil society further.

Preeda's contribution also helps shed some light on how Muslim NGOs in Thailand have helped prepare Muslims for national political leadership. Just as in the case of Chaiwat's example, it is obvious that the Muslim leaders trained by the Thai Muslim Students Association (TMSA) that Preeda mentions could not have possibly assumed positions of national leadership in the absence of a conducive democratic political environment. Sharon's case study of the Association of Muslim Professionals (AMP) illustrates how Muslims could use modern ideas and organizational skills to strive to create a dynamic community emphasizing educational and social needs in a non-partisan way. Anyone familiar with Singapore will

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immediately know why only this option will work. The success of AMP also demonstrates categorically how Muslims, especially those living as minorities, could benefit from civil society.

Mastura's discussion about the *waqf* in Mindanao also introduces an interesting perspective to civil society while raising some valid questions such as the place of Armed Resistance Groups (ARG) in civil society. Muslims, on the one hand, appear to take advantage of what civil society has to offer in the Philippines but at the same time, especially in parts of Mindanao where there is an on-going separatist insurrection, reject the legitimacy of the Filipino state itself. A point worth noting here is that unlike Thailand, the unresolved political problems in parts of the country seems to have hampered the emergence of more politically constructive Muslim NGOs in the Philippines. Both, Mohamad Abu Bakar and Sharifah Zaleha, in their discussions on the role of Islam in the emerging civil society in Malaysia, provide new insights into the changing role of the Muslims. Mohamad Fajrul's treatment of Nahdlatul Ulama, a mass Muslim movement, which was formed way back in 1926, and Amin Abdullah's examination of the Muhammadiyah, another mass organization which was established even earlier, in 1912, long before this current wave of civil society, seem to reinforce the claim by the Muslims that they have been operating in the public space between the family and the state, using relatively modern ideas of organization much longer than usually appreciated. Osman Bakar's exposition of Islam's advocacy of inter-civilizational dialogue as well as Nurcholish Madjid's discussion of Islamic doctrinal resources and its relation to the modern concept of civil society appropriately introduce an esoteric dimension to the discussion on Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia. It is likely that an inconclusive picture will emerge out of the above discourse on the relationship between Islam and civil society in Southeast Asia but what should be clear is that, in their different ways, these contributions show that civil society is not at all perceived as being incompatible with Islam.

There is actually a wider Muslim representation in civil society in Southeast Asia, which could not be fully covered either in this volume. In Cambodia, for example, which is now witnessing an unprecedented growth in NGOs, Muslims have also taken the initiative to establish their own. There are a number of active Muslim NGOs in Cambodia but one particular NGO which merits mention is the Cambodian Muslim Development Foundation, which was founded in 1997 with the objective of disseminating Islamic *dakwah* according to the Qur'an and Sunna so as to increase the understanding and spiritual appreciation of Islam among the Muslims and

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the general public. This is one version of inter-faith dialogue that Osman Bakar talks about that Muslims in Cambodia, in practical terms, want to promote. Thus although the organization is distinctively Islamic in spirit and intent, the fact that it wants to engage the non-Muslims reflects not only growing confidence in Islam but a positive desire to reach out to the wider public in an attempt to fulfil their wider responsibilities of citizenship sanctioned by their religious faith. Islam warrants loyalty of the Muslims to their respective states, Muslim or otherwise, as long as the sanctity of Islam is not violated. The Cambodian Muslims appear to be responding very positively to the political changes unfolding in Cambodia.

In Myanmar, on account of its closed and rigid political system, civil society has extremely limited space to operate. But, despite very difficult circumstances, Muslim NGOs, some of which have their origin during British colonial rule, are still actively serving the public. There are a few Muslim NGOs in Laos but the Lao Muslim Association (LMA) based in Vientiane, is the most prominent. In Vietnam too, the space for civil society is very restricted but Muslims do have their own NGO. In contrast to the situation in the above countries, Islam is so pervasive in public life that Muslim NGOs in Brunei tend to be either sponsored by the government or co-opted by it, blurring the space between the two.

When we talk about the Muslim NGOs here we have been basically referring to NGOs with a direct Muslim orientation such as in terms of make-up, leadership, objectives, and even idiom. It is important to acknowledge that this actually represents only one type of NGO. In view of the multi-ethnic and multi-religious context of Southeast Asia, it is inevitable that there are also many NGOs, in Muslim majority as well as Muslim minority countries, which have nothing to do with Islam directly but which are either led and/or supported by Muslims. The Consumers Association of Penang (CAP) which has been one of Malaysia's most prominent NGO has been led by a Muslim, S.M. Idris, for a long time. Aliran, another well-known Malaysian NGO also used to have a Muslim leader in Chandra Muzaffar for a long time and now has many Muslim members. The President of the Malaysian Automobile Makers Association who is also the President of the ASEAN Automobile Federation, Aishah Ahmad, is a Muslim lady. Muslims, along with non-Muslims, participate as equal members of trade unions, sports clubs, social bodies, professional associations, business groups, school or university alumni, citizen's movements in and, so on, all over Southeast Asia, without feeling any sense of alienation. In practically every country in Southeast Asia, Muslims participate in NGO activities which have nothing to do with Islam directly.

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Likewise the networking that is taking place between national and even regional networks has also enabled Muslims in NGOs and Muslim NGOs to interact and relate to non-Muslims as well as non-Muslim NGOs in a spirit of friendship and co-operation.

We can conclude that the state of civil society in Southeast Asia is generally characterized by the following factors:

It is only generally understood in its narrow context to represent NGOs. This definition, however, includes civil action groups, independent research organizations, and philanthropic bodies. Thus, when we talk about civil society in Southeast Asia we are in effect referring to NGOs. Although the history of NGOs may not be all that new in Southeast Asia, it is only from the early 1990s that its growth has been visible. The role and effectiveness of NGOs vary significantly from country to country and may depend on a range of factors. For example, according to Corrothers and Suryatna,[15] the major achievement of Indonesian NGOs at the macro level has been the increase in awareness of particular issues on the national political agenda and their ability to raise more general concerns for the environment, human rights, and democratization.[16] There is a distinct correlation between the political system of a particular country and the fate of NGOs. Democratic and liberal political systems tend to be supportive of NGOs whereas authoritarian ones are generally suspicious, if not hostile to NGOs and their activities. In communist Vietnam and Laos, and Myanmar under the military regime, the scope for NGOs is very limited. In contrast to this situation, in the Philippines, NGOs flourished under the Aquino government, because of their role as catalysts in nation-building and the respect they gained from the international community. It was also the NGO community that made up the base of the Aquino political machinery. [17] According to Alatas, in Malaysia, NGO activities are limited ostensibly because national security is under threat.[18] Lim Teck Ghee expresses the same sentiment in his report in Yamamoto's volume. [19] Most NGOs in Southeast Asia, with the exception of those in the Philippines and to a lesser extent Thailand, tend to concentrate on issues or development rather than political activities. Referring to the situations in Indonesia and Malaysia, Alatas observes that "they have generally been confined to developmental rather than political issues".[20] The majority of NGOs, except perhaps for those which evolved from traditional backgrounds such as Mutual Help Societies or those that are very local, appear to be dependent on external support and funding especially from the developed countries, often giving rise to suspicions or accusations by the authorities that they are being manipulated by foreign governments or agencies with vested interests. NGOs are essentially run

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and managed by the middle class or the élites and despite maintaining links with the masses sometimes, carry the image of being middle class or élite organizations. NGOs generally have to operate under restrictive or difficult conditions. Networking between NGOs in the region and beyond is still limited but within their own countries there is evidence of efforts to establish a wider national network. Church groups in the Philippines and Indonesia and to a lesser extent Singapore represent some of the most active NGOs. Other religious groups are also active. NGOs in Southeast Asia are still severely underdeveloped in their task to help strengthen the foundations of their respective societies. The role of NGOs is still not clearly understood by the general public. Governments in the region are beginning to recognize the importance of NGOs but have been trying to co-opt NGOs, or sponsor their own in an attempt to undermine or neutralize the independence of these movements.

FUTURE PROSPECTS

The importance of civil society cannot be underestimated. It is now generally accepted as an integral part of modern and even post-modern life. It is already regarded as a force in global affairs that cannot be ignored. This view is strongly reflected in the Report of the Secretary-General of the United Nations which states that:

> Non-governmental organizations and other civil society actors are now perceived not only as disseminators of information or providers of services but also as shapers of policy, be it in peace and security matters, in development or in humanitarian affairs. The involvement of non-governmental organizations and other actors, such as parliamentarians, local authorities and business leaders, in the United Nations global conferences demonstrates this. It would now be difficult to imagine organizing a global event and formulating multilateral agreements and declarations without the active participation of non-governmental organizations.[21]

The Report underlines the indispensable role of civil society as an essential part of reforming the United Nations, arguing that "the Organization needs to review and update the ways in which it interacts with civil society, as it seeks to serve both the Governments and the peoples of the world" (ibid., para. 215). It is also pertinent here to highlight an important declaration

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which was made by the member states and observers of the United Nations on the occasion its fiftieth anniversary, which reads:

> We recognize that our common work will be the more successful if it is supported by all concerned actors of the international community, including non-governmental organizations, multilateral financial institutions, regional organizations and all actors of civil society. We will welcome and facilitate such support, as appropriate. (ibid., para. 215)

All the Southeast Asian governments, as members of the United Nations, are party to the above declaration and must be aware of the major changes taking place on the global scene. The United Nations, as a form of global government, has given notice that it is now going to work not just with the governments of the world but also with the people of the world. The countries in Southeast Asia will have to respond positively to this changing global structure if the wider and long-term interests of their people are to be safeguarded and promoted. But civil society in its various forms already exists in Southeast Asia. It is both visible and viable. It has, in some cases, acquired more history than is commonly known or appreciated. But it is certainly still very much underdeveloped, lacking space, scope, and even direction, especially, when it has to face all sorts of obstacles, including common prejudice, governmental restrictions, public apathy, lack of funding, and poor management. But actually, the problem now for the governments and the peoples of Southeast Asia, is no longer whether or not to recognize the role of civil society but rather how to harness its full potential.

In view of the fact that the state of development of civil society in Southeast Asia is uneven, the approach that each country will have to chart will therefore vary from each other significantly, at least initially. But specifically for the Muslims who constitute the majority population in Brunei, Indonesia, and Malaysia, and are significant minorities in practically every country in Southeast Asia, they will also have to resolve the issue of how to reconcile their faith with this emerging scenario. The messages from Southeast Asia that we are getting from the Muslims in Southeast Asia, as reflected in this volume, for example, so far, have been positive and encouraging. Apparently, viewed from the functional perspective Islam seems to have no problem at all with the idea of civil society. In fact, Muslims often claim that civil society constitutes an important domain of Islam. It is, however, in the realm of the normative that there is going to

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be a lot of tension and disagreement between the Islamic and the Western notion of civil society, which is advocated by Gellner. The Western notion sees it as an independent and complete order, free from the state or any other form of competitor, including Islam that is considered as one of its most serious rivals. It is in the nature of Islam, as a complete order in itself not to admit anything unquestioningly. But Islam is also a very practical and rational faith. Muslims are given considerable leeway by Islam to lead their lives in all kinds of contexts. Muslims will continually turn to their core beliefs, or to vertical Islam as represented basically by the Qur'an and Sunna for guidance and inspiration, but beyond that, horizontally, in their social, cultural, economic, and political relations with others, they are very pragmatic. This is the pluralism of Islam, which many Muslim scholars have been trying to highlight apparently without much success. The Muslim *ummah*, which Gellner seems so obsessive about, is not solely exclusive. Membership in the Muslim *ummah* is only exclusive up to a point since Muslims are invoked to reach out to others to live in peace and harmony. Muslims therefore do not see any contradiction in being members of the Muslim *ummah* at one level while at the same time sharing membership with others in any number of other overlapping communities, be they local, national, regional, international, professional, educational, social, or cultural. This is the point which Chaiwat tries to make in his contribution that the role of Islam in non-Muslim contexts must also be appreciated if one is to understand Islam at all.

The function of contexts needs to be appreciated not just for the Muslims but also all the other communities in Southeast Asia. In view of the existence of Muslim minorities in practically every country in the world with all their respective peculiarities, it is only reasonable to assume that the practice of Islam will be adapted to conform to local conditions and demands. We have already established in the foregoing section that there is the uncompromisable vertical core of Islam that must be present or at least recognized for Islam to exist. To remove that would mean to deny Islam's existence. But that core is essentially the private core which encompasses pure areas of belief. It does not in any significant way, however, incorporate culture or political system, which really is the most dominant aspect of our lives. Thus, for example, while belief in the oneness of God constitutes an uncompromisable tenet in Islam, which, in any case is a deeply private matter of conscience, Muslims are allowed to recite their supplication (*doa*) in any language of their choice, directly and without any intermediary. Although Arabic, as a language of revelation, is accorded a special position in Islam, every human language is equally

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recognized in Islam. It is not just Persian, Turkish, Urdu, Swahili, or Malay that may be considered Islamic languages but also every other including Japanese and English. This demonstrates the dynamic pluralistic perspective that Islam entertains especially with regard its horizontal relations with other faiths. This is also how the role of contexts becomes crucial in trying to understand Muslim societies.

Thus, for Muslims in Southeast Asia, irrespective of whether or not they are in the majority or the minority, the reality of their pluralistic environment in which they live, cannot be ignored. Whether it is in the workplace, bus, market, theatre, shopping mall, or playing field, the Muslims are bound to interact with the non-Muslims in all kinds of situations. As citizens of their respective countries they share common concerns. It would be an insult to the Muslims not to acknowledge that they also share the kinds of concern that many NGOs try to champion, like environmental protection, empowerment, accountability, justice, and rights of indigenous minorities. In Malaysia, for example, Muslims also participate in all kinds of capacities in some of the country's most active NGOs like the Federation of Malaysian Consumers Association (FOMCA), Bar Council of Malaysia, Malaysian Human Rights Society (HAKAM), All Women's Action Society of Malaysia, Malaysian Trades Union Congress, and many more. A similar situation is true in most of the rest of Southeast Asia where it involves Muslims. Thus, religion is not at all an obstacle here. There is, therefore, one form of compatibility here between Islam and civil society. The Muslims have no problem relating to NGOs especially when their obvious objective is to promote the common good. But whether or not NGOs are active or effective in particular contexts also depend on other factors which may have nothing to do with Islam. It is obvious that it is not only Islam that is dictating the pace and pattern of civil society in Southeast Asia. It is just one factor among many.

Even for Muslim NGOs, which have been discussed at length elsewhere in this volume, the contextual factors are equally important. A conducive political environment, has made it possible for the Ban Krua Muslims to successfully organize a civic protest action, through the manipulation of Islamic symbols and tradition, against a mega highway project in the heart of Bangkok. A similar action would probably not be tolerated at a different time in Thailand under a different regime or elsewhere in Southeast Asia where the political system is much more rigid. I am pretty sure that such a protest movement could never have happened under Phibul Songkhram, Sarit Thanarat, or Thanom Kittikachorn. In 1947, Haji Sulong tried to organize a peaceful protest movement against the Thai

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authorities to seek greater autonomy for the Malays but he was killed and his supporters detained or penalized. In 1976 in Thailand, when students staged a peaceful protest at Thammasat University over the impending return of the former military dictator, Thanom Kittikachorn, they were virtually massacred on the spot by the hundreds causing thousands to flee to the jungle to seek shelter. Although there were Muslims among them, most of the students were Buddhists. The Ban Krua civil protest shows how far Thailand has actually moved forward in terms of political openness and tolerance. I am also not sure if the civic action undertaken in Ban Krua would work in a different country like Myanmar, Vietnam, Singapore, or even Malaysia, for that matter! In the Philippines, the gun still seems to be the preferred solution in dealing with the Muslim separatists. The kind of freedom that the Muslims in Thailand seem to enjoy today, partly as a consequence of the quality of democracy that exists there, is nowhere close to where their fellow Muslims are in most other Southeast Asian countries. In fact, it may well be that Muslims in Thailand enjoy more freedom than their counterparts in some other Muslim majority countries.

If context is important, as we have argued, then the future of civil society in Southeast Asia is also greatly dependent on developments within the individual countries in Southeast Asia as well as the region as a whole. The exemplary case of Thailand offers us hope on the future of civil society in Southeast Asia as a whole. But even in Thailand, compared to the developed world, civil society still has plenty of ground to cover. Democracy in Thailand too is far from perfect. Every country in the region has its own pool of problems ranging from glaring socio-economic disparities among its peoples, environmental destruction, lack of transparency, corruption, nepotism, cronyism, injustice, domestic violence, and drug abuse, to the growing spread of AIDS and HIV. Their very existence shows the limitations of the role of government. And governments too openly admit their inability to overcome all these complex issues. This is where the role of civil society becomes crucially important. The growing significance of the role of civil society has been recognized at the highest level of global governance at the United Nations. It is unhelpful, if not foolish, for the governments and the peoples of Southeast Asia not to take notice of this significant development and prepare themselves to face the realities of the changing world. The Muslims of Southeast Asia also know that they too need to respond positively to this situation. The current discourse on the relationship between Islam and civil society, one among many, is evidence of a positive development.

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There are Muslim NGOs and more importantly there are also Muslims in other NGOs. Islam can easily relate to civil society. The idea of working for the common good, which civil society espouses, seems too good for the Muslims to overlook. What remains unclear, however, is how concretely and exactly Islam is going to help enrich the perspective of civil society in Southeast Asia. A much more open political environment is needed not only to help civil society achieve its full potential but also to enable Islam to utilize its under-harnessed resources. In the context of Southeast Asia, both seem ready for each other.

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Islam & Civil Society in Southeast Asia

The Islamic world, often regarded as an anathema to civil society, in fact has rich traditions of associational life pursuing "common good". These religious resources have been reinterpreted for the enhancement of civic virtues and participatory politics in contemporary context, that is, democratization. Such pioneering efforts have been clearly observable in Muslim Southeast Asia. In November 1999, the Sasakawa Peace Foundation invited ten Muslim activists and scholars from the region to Japan for exchanging views and experiences among themselves and with Japanese participants. Here their papers and discussions are compiled into a book, *Islam and Civil Society in Southeast Asia*.

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